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SETHIAN GNOSTICISM AND THE PLATONIC TRADITION

BY

JOHN D. TURNER

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In memory of

my father

WARREN OSMAN TURNER

1899-1996

"... the granite of New Hampshire ..."

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a study of the relationships between Gnosticism—in particular Sethian Gnosticism—and Platonism in the five centuries from 100 BCE to 400 CE. It has grown out of my work as an editor, translator, and interpreter of various treatises of Nag Hammadi Library from the time that certain of these materials became available to me beginning in 1967 as a doctoral student in Coptology and New Testament studies at Duke University. Just prior to completing my 1970 dissertation on the *Book of Thomas the Contender* from Nag Hammadi Codex II at the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity in Claremont, California, I and my doctoral supervisor, Professor Orval Wintermute, were assigned to edit and translate the treatise *Allogenes* from Nag Hammadi Codex XI for the Coptic Gnostic Project's English language critical edition of the entire library, edited by J. M. Robinson. In 1974 Hans-Martin Schenke recognized that this treatise was one among 14 Nag Hammadi tractates that exhibited a common "system" of gnostic doctrines that clustered around the figure of Adam's son Seth, thus bringing to light the early existence of a religious movement that Epiphanius of Salamis had identified as "Sethian." In short, Sethianism is probably the earliest gnostic movement distinctively attested by its own literature, a religious competitor of early Christianity and an active participant the Platonic philosophical discourse of the first four centuries. Thus began some thirty years of my own preoccupation with these Sethian treatises, and in particular *Allogenes* and three other closely related treatises, *Zostrianos*, *Marsanes*, and the *Three Steles of Seth*, which I have called the four "Platonizing Sethian treatises" that constitute the main topic of the last third of this book.

Not having been trained as a classicist or historian of Greek philosophy, the obvious indebtedness of these treatises to the technical metaphysics of Platonism led to my entry upon the steep "learning curve" demanded of any student of the Platonic philosophical tradition from Plato to Proclus. As the footnotes and bibliography show, this book stands on the shoulders of giants that have established a field of study in which I am only a reasonably-informed amateur, but one who is convinced of the tremendous importance of these texts for understanding the history of Platonism, especially that murky period of the first three

centuries CE when the metaphysics of what is known as Middle Platonism were developed into the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and his successors.

The book is divided into an introduction to various ways in which the relation of Gnosticism and Platonism have been characterized, followed by three main sections devoted respectively to Sethian literature and history, to Platonic doctrines and their history, and to the Platonizing Sethian treatises in particular, and concludes with an overview of Sethian religion. The main thrust of this work lies in the third main section; readers interested mainly in the Sethian religion and its history may well confine themselves to the first seven chapters, and those well-acquainted with Plato, the Old Academy, Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism may well skip Chapters 8 through 11.

In preparing this volume, with minor exceptions, I have generally relied upon the English translations of the Nag Hammadi texts in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* edited by James M. Robinson, upon an early draft of Michael Williams' translation of the *Apocryphon of John*, and upon Bentley Layton's translation of the *Three Steles of Seth* in his *The Gnostic Scriptures*, while the English translations of *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes* are my own. Biblical translations are from the 1946 Revised Standard Version of *The Holy Bible*. I have similarly relied upon John Dillon's *The Middle Platonists* and the Loeb Classical Library (especially A. H. Armstrong for Plotinus) for translations of most Platonic authors, and upon Gerald Bechtle and Pierre Hadot for translations of the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*. Citations of Greek sources are drawn from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* CD-ROM E.

I am especially grateful to those colleagues who have read and criticized the entire manuscript: Gordon Watley, Régine Charron, Jesper Hyldahl, and Paul-Hubert Poirier. For other advice and criticism, I am deeply indebted to Wolf-Peter Funk in matters pertaining to the Coptic texts and translations, and to Ruth Majercik, Kevin Corrigan, John Finamore, Gerald Bechtle, and other members of the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar on Gnosticism and Later Platonism, especially Birger Pearson for his seminal work on Marsanes. I must also express my fundamental intellectual indebtedness—especially for the chapters on Platonism—to a number of eminent twentieth century historians of Greek philosophy: Arthur H. Armstrong, Matthias Baltes, Luc Brisson,

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Preparing a work of this complexity in camera-ready format is a tedious task for any author; I am thus enduringly grateful to Éric Crégheur at Université Laval for verifying the lengthy index locorum, and especially to Paul Dussault of TXT Micro-édition in Québec, who had to solve many technical problems in preparing the final manuscript for Les Presses de l'Université Laval.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Elizabeth Ann Sterns for her extraordinary patience and understanding during the frequent absences entailed by my preoccupation with this research; this work is therefore dedicated not only to the memory of my father, Warren O. Turner, but also with heartfelt gratitude to her as well.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM OF THE RELATION BETWEEN GNOSTICISM AND PLATONISM

I. Introduction

This book is an attempt to describe some of the relationships between Gnosticism—in particular Sethian Gnosticism—and Platonism in the five centuries from 100 BCE to 400 CE. These relationships are extraordinarily complex and can never be completely delineated. But the undertaking is worthwhile for several reasons. A number of new gnostic writings discovered in recent times has made it obvious that some rather precise relationships certainly existed. While much attention has been focused on the relationship between these gnostic materials and the traditions of contemporary Judaism and Christianity, comparatively little attention has been focused on the philosophical, particularly Platonic, component of these gnostic teachings. To be sure, eminent scholars have characterized Gnosticism as a "proletarian Platonism" or as "a Platonism run wild," suggesting that Platonism is central to the understanding of Gnosticism. Equally prominent scholars have held that the contribution of Gnosticism to the understanding of the history of Platonism is not a topic of central concern, but better treated under the category of "some loose ends," or, even more, that the influence of Gnosticism on Platonism "was not genuine but extraneous and, for the most part superficial."

It is the purpose of this book to examine these relationships and possible mutual influences between Platonism and Gnosticism in greater detail and, so far as possible, to refrain from any such memorable generalizations. Not all brands of Gnosticism or Platonism can be treated in the compass of this book. I shall concentrate for the most part on a specific type of Gnosticism, known as "Sethian Gnosticism," because there are demonstrable connections between certain of its textual exponents and well-known Platonic philosophers. Although there are pertinent connections between Gnosticism and many facets and schools of Greek philosophy, I shall concentrate on the Platonism of the first four centu-

ries of our era, known as "Middle Platonism" and "Neoplatonism," since it is this philosophy which is most in evidence in the gnostic materials.

A. Gnosticism

Gnosticism was a spiritual movement of the first four centuries of our era that typifies better than most movements of those times the religiosity of the Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman world: extreme religious eclecticism and a skeptical attitude toward the perfection and self-sufficiency of the world. It can be thought of as a dualistic religion of salvation in which the soul or divine element in humankind sought release from its necessary but unnatural—even if temporary—residence in a material world made by a creator not identical with the supreme deity, and a return to its native home in the divine world of light. This escape and return is made possible by Gnosis, a kind of revealed or intuitive insight that enabled a recognition of one's divine identity in the face of the alien but familiar world of everyday experience, beset by uncertainty, hostility, frustration, suffering and death. Thus the Gnostic is one who feels enabled to claim possession of a clear knowledge of the character of ultimate reality, unlike, for example, the agnostic, who claims not to know the character of ultimate reality.

As Hans Jonas, the late distinguished phenomenologist of Gnosticism characterized it, the content of gnostic revelations is for the most part mythology. In fact, Gnosticism seems to be the last prominent outbreak of mythology in antiquity, coming at a time when the prophets and philosophers of the earlier, classical phase of antiquity had striven and nearly succeeded in ridding thought of its ancient basis in mythology. One might even say that Gnosticism arose in part as a strident rejection of the rationalization of the ancient myths that had been achieved by the classical prophets and philosophers. Nevertheless, this recrudescent gnostic mythology seems often to have a rather contrived, sophisticated, and literary character, rather than being the expression of any originative mythopoeic consciousness. It is for this reason frequently referred to as "secondary" rather than "primary" myth, or as "mythology" rather than the sort of myth one finds in considerably more ancient texts. Gnostic teaching is conveyed more often by images and paradoxes than reasoned argument; on the other hand, many of the texts that fall under the heading of "gnostic" are devoted to the exploration and resolution of fundamental paradoxes that appear not only in daily life but also in some of

the foundational and dominantly authoritative traditions and texts of antiquity, such as the Jewish and Christian scriptures and well-known accounts of the origin and nature of the universe, such as the book of Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus*. Although gnostic teaching is to some extent a response to an inner experience of alienation from the ordinary world, its basic message is one of triumph over one's limitations and a mastery of the spiritual dimensions of life. Gnostic teaching never resorts to the language of inner feeling and emotion, but always to an objectivized description of the exterior world, both in its spiritual and material domains, which is assumed to be responsible for the inner feelings of both humiliation and exaltation. One might even say that much of gnostic myth is the externalization or the projection of this inner experience in the form of a cosmic drama. In this sense, gnostic teaching is always of an optimistic character, full of the certainty that despair can and will be overcome as one truly appropriates the gnostic vision of reality.

Until the early 1950's, Gnosticism was known mainly through the polemical refutations of it produced by various of the ante-Nicene Church Fathers, supplemented by a few original gnostic writings. But beginning with the 1945 chance discovery of a library of thirteen Coptic codices near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt, more than forty new original gnostic writings have been added to the pool of evidence about gnostic teaching. The patristic portrayal of these Gnostics as heretics who departed from the one universal Great Church and formed hundreds of individual sectarian groups has been shown by these new texts to be an ecclesiological construct rather than a reflection of any actual state of affairs. While some of the Nag Hammadi treatises, such as an excerpt from Plato's *Republic* X 588A-589B or the *Teachings of Silvanus*, can hardly be categorized as "gnostic" at all, and others seem to be products of individual inspiration with unknown affiliation, most of them fall into only a few rather well-defined groups which can be broadly labeled as pagan Hermetic, Judaeo-Christian Sethian and Christian Valentinian.

Of these categories, one that has provoked much recent debate among scholars is the one named "Sethian." In the first large scale work to treat the Nag Hammadi texts, Jean Doresse considered the Nag Hammadi collection to be a Sethian library, owing to the many instances of the name "Seth" throughout the treatises and the similarity of their teaching

to those Gnostics called "Sethians" in the patristic literature.[1] While today no one would accept a Sethian designation for the entire library, scholars have largely accepted Sethianism as one of the most dominant and earliest expressions of the teaching found in many of the Nag Hammadi treatises. One of the main points of debate about this Sethianism centers around the question whether Sethianism is only a convenient name by which to refer to a fairly distinctive collection of gnostic texts, or whether Sethianism may in fact refer to a socially identifiable religious movement, either an independent tradition or school of thought or a distinctive sect of Judaism or Christianity.

Working on the basis of the extant textual material, Hans-Martin Schenke has attempted to reconstruct an actual Sethian system of doctrine.[2] Schenke derives the content of the Sethian system from the Nag Hammadi texts *Apocryphon of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Three Steles of Seth*, *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, *Melchizedek*, *Thought of Norea*, and *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Also to be included in this list are certain texts outside the Nag Hammadi library, the Untitled Text from the Bruce Codex, and certain patristic accounts, especially Irenaeus' report on the Barbeloites in *Adv. Haer.* I.29 and Epiphanius' report on doctrines of the Gnostics, Sethians and Archontics in *Panarion* 26 and 39-40.[3]

From these works, one may characterize the Sethian system in terms of a self-identification of these Gnostics with the spiritual "seed" of Seth, their spiritual ancestor, who intervened twice in the course of primordial history to save his progeny from the clutches of an angry world creator and had appeared for a third time in recent history bearing a revelation and saving baptism which would secure their final salvation. Also characteristic of Sethian doctrine is the teaching concerning a supreme divine trinity of Father, Mother and Child, the Four Luminaries established by the Son as heavenly dwellings for the seed of Seth, and the sacred baptism of the Five Seals by which the earthly seed of Seth is elevated into the light. This Sethian form of Gnosticism is probably the earliest form of Gnosticism for which there is broad textual attestation; in its early non-Christian, Judaic form, it appears to antedate the other early and equally well-documented form of Christian Gnosticism, that of the followers of Valentinus. In the Nag Hammadi Library, no less than eleven of its fifty-three treatises fit the designation "Sethian Gnostic." Not only do they reveal the existence of an early and hitherto unrecognized religious competitor of early Christianity, but also of a religio-philosophical tradition with a two-hundred-year long history of engagement with the metaphysics of Middle Platonism sufficiently distinctive as to have attracted the critical attention of Plotinus and other members of his philosophical seminar in Rome during the years 244-265 CE. It is for this reason that this study will be mostly concerned with Sethian Gnosticism, adducing material from Valentinian and other, less well-known gnostic materials as necessary.

1. Jean DORESSE, *Les livres secrets des Gnostiques d'Égypte*, I: Introduction aux écrits gnostiques coptes découverts à Khénoboskion (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1958), Eng. trans. *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

2. H.-M. SCHENKE, "Das sethianische System nach Nag-Hammadi-Handschriften," in *Studia Coptica*, ed. P. Nagel (Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten 45. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1974), 165-173 and "The Phenomenon and Significance of Sethian Gnosticism," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, Vol. 2: Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton (Studies in the History of Religions 41; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 588-616.

3. For a detailed inventory, see Chapter 2.

B. Platonism

Because of Sethianism's prolonged engagement with Platonism, the other principal subject of this book will be the history of Platonic metaphysics, especially as it interacted with Gnosticism. In this process it contributed much to Gnosticism, but it is also clear that Gnosticism made its own contribution to Platonic philosophy, especially in the transition from what has been characterized as Middle Platonism to the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and his successors.

At his death in 347 BCE, Plato bequeathed a philosophical heritage that has not even yet spent its power. Although there will be some attempt here to sketch out the main lines of the development of Platonic metaphysics from Plato onwards, it is especially the developments of the years 100 BCE until 375 CE that are of the most significance for the interaction between Platonism and Gnosticism. This is the period ranging from the rise of Middle Platonism and its merger with Neopythagorean arithmological speculation typical of first century BCE Alexandrian philosophy until the rise of Neoplatonic philosophy under Plotinus and his successors in the third and fourth centuries CE.

A central characteristic of the philosophy of the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods, including Platonism, was its concern with the general issue of human happiness, not only in its ethical dimension but especially in its spiritual dimension. Accordingly, one notices a strong influence of oriental religious traditions upon the sphere of Greek philosophical speculation, with the result that philosophies such as Epicureanism, Stoicism and Platonism tend to display a marked dogmatism, nearly as if their practitioners regarded their doctrine as bordering on a kind of revelation. This trend towards dogmatism in the Platonic tradition followed a metaphysically dry period (ca. 270-70 BCE) during which the Platonic school, called the "Academy" after its location on the outskirts of fifth-century Athens, turned away from the metaphysical speculations of Plato and his earliest successors toward a Pyrrhonic skepticism which held that all knowledge was merely a matter of probability. This move was justified by the claim that Plato had corrupted the authentic Socratic method of questioning by straying off into the wonderland of speculative metaphysical theorizing. But by the first century BCE the mood had changed. The popular religious sentiment of these times was much more attracted to a philosophy like Plato's that explained—indeed revealed—the supreme cause of the world as a divine and paternal figure who could be touched upon by reflective thought, unlike the dreary calculations of skeptical Academic philosophy, the rather dry moralism and somewhat mechanical cosmology of the Stoics, and the tough-minded asceticism and non-theistic atomism of the Epicureans. The Middle Platonism of the first century BCE is marked by a deference to ancient authority, be it that of Plato or Pythagoras. It adopted Aristotle's logic and philosophy of mind, and maintained the tendency, characteristic of Plato, the Old Academy, and contemporary Neopythagoreanism, to make a sharp distinction between this world and the divine realm beyond it and to populate the intermediate zone with spiritual powers (δαίμονες). After the turn to the first century BCE, (Middle) Platonism had taken a distinctively religious turn; its watchword could have been very aptly taken from Plato's dictum concerning the supreme goal of human effort: "to assimilate oneself to God insofar as possible" (*Theaetetus* 176B).

It is not hard to see that a religio-philosophical outlook such as this would synchronize nicely with the spiritual quest of Gnosticism. Both were dualistic, viewing the ordinary world as a less than perfect copy of

a transcendent ideal realm that was the primordial home of the human soul. Both agreed that the world was not the direct, immediate product of the supreme deity. Both held that the goal of the human soul was to return to its divine origin. And both had a tendency toward withdrawal from active involvement in worldly affairs and the satisfaction of bodily appetites. But for all this similarity, there were differences in nuance: gnostic dualism frequently—though by no means consistently—tended towards an anticosmic dualism of world rejection, in which the world of ordinary perception was regarded as anti-divine, a trap made by an ignorant—even evil—creator to seduce and imprison the divine element in humankind. Of course, if one availed oneself of the proper revelation, this divine element could transcend the world and return to its source. On the other hand, Platonic dualism, with certain notable exceptions, was a mainly pro-cosmic dualism in which this world was held to be the best possible material rendition of the truly perfect and ordered realm of the divine. No matter how one might suffer in it, this world is a good and ordered place; its existence is necessary and probably eternal, and it is overseen by a divine providence that justifies its habitation by humans through whom the divine is made present in it. Although being too attached to this world might cause the soul to lose sight of its divine affinity, this world was nevertheless full of evidence of divine providence, and if one only undertook the necessary effort and training, one could transcend its limitations, and through unaided contemplation approach the very limits of the divine.

Although many Platonists could posit a primal principle of evil to account for the lack of perfection in the world, they never seem to have believed that such a principle could absolutely corrupt this world. This was also true for many Gnostics as well, particularly those influenced by Platonism. For the Platonic tradition, the principle opposed to the good is also a necessary one, since it is the principle of indefinite multiplicity which is necessary for the existence of anything beyond that of the sole being of the supreme divinity itself. Without this multiplicity, this basic contrast or opposition between the two principles of unity and diversity, nothing could be known or defined; indeed, conscious life, which depends on the recognition of the distinction between self and other-than-self, could never exist. Such a principle of indefinite multiplicity could naturally lend itself to the explanation of various of the evils we experience in this world, but by and large this evil principle was considered to

be a passive one, part of the essential furniture of the world, rather than a proactive antagonistic principle which acted against the good by its own power and initiative. While the sublunar world of ordinary experience was beset with evils, the upper world beyond the moon, often regarded as the abode of those souls freed from the mortal body, was not held to be infected with any independently existing evil force; whatever traces of an evil principle might be found there submitted freely to the principle of limit and form. As to the question why human souls might be at all found on this earth with its evils, the answers ranged from traditional Pythagorean and Orphic notions of a primordial sin and the attendant fall of souls into bodies for the purposes of purification to the notion more typical of Plato's *Timaeus* and the later Neoplatonist Iamblichus that divinely-originated souls were sent hither to carry out the work of the divine powers here below. In either case, the purpose of such incarnation was generally conceived to be a positive one.[4]

Most Platonists of the first two centuries CE also tended to distinguish between a first and second god, a supreme intellect aloof from the world and an active, creative intellect at work upon the world, which seems similar to the gnostic distinction between the high deity and the ignorant creator of this world. But whereas for many Gnostics, the relationship between the two was one of conflict, for the Platonists, the relationship was one of dependence: the first God is an entirely transcendent, self-intelligizing figure having nothing directly to do with the world, while the second God is an actively creative and provident God who always acts in accord with its vision of the perfection of the first God. On the other hand, the gnostic creator's emulation of the first God is not direct and immediate, but is at best a mere reflection of the supreme divine realm. This distinction between two Gods, accompanied by a tendency of both Gnostics and Platonists to posit a host of intermediary beings between these Gods on the one hand and the world of humankind on the other, stems from the intuition that no matter how good the world, God may not be contaminated or disturbed from too close an involvement with the material world. The Matter of which this world is made has a certain inherent intractability with which it would be beneath the dignity

4. See J. M. DILLON, "The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, March 28-31, 1978.* Vol. 2. Sethian Gnosticism, ed. B. Layton (Supplements to *Numen* 41. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 357-364.

of the deity to occupy itself, lest somehow it become distracted from the self-intelligizing upon which the stability of everything else depended. And the fixed existence of this stability as expressed in the perfection of geometrical shape and mathematical harmony meant that any inherent disorderliness in Matter could never ultimately assert itself.

From these few considerations, one can see that there is adequate warrant for trying to assess these relationships, both similarities and differences, between Platonism and Gnosticism in greater detail. And, as we shall see, a reason to confine our attention mostly to the peculiar form of Gnosticism known as Sethian will be the appearance in several of those treatises of a procosmism not unlike that of many contemporary Platonists. In the literature of Sethian Gnosticism, one meets both a radical otherworldliness and innerworldliness, both a strong anticosmism and a procosmism, reflecting a certain ambiguity about aspects of human existence that can be traced in the Platonic sources as well.

II. VIEWS ON THE RELATION OF GNOSTICISM TO PLATONISM

For nearly nineteen centuries it has been generally recognized that Greek philosophy and religion contributed in one way or another to the formation of Gnosticism, especially the more philosophical gnostic systems of the first four centuries of our era. Singled out as the foundational components of Greek philosophy and religion are the philosophies of Plato and, to a lesser extent, of Pythagoras.

The nature and extent of the Platonic contribution to Gnosticism has been delineated in roughly three ways:

1. Gnosticism as Platonism. The view, arising in late antiquity, that Gnosticism is a derivative of the religio-philosophical tradition stemming from Plato and Pythagoras.

2. Platonism as incipient Gnosticism. The view that Platonic philosophy is, at various points along the trajectory of the Platonic tradition, a derivative of certain existential dispositions toward self and world expressed in myths that parallel or are taken up into later gnostic systems where those dispositions can be seen to be fundamentally gnostic in outlook.

3. Gnosticism and later Platonism as interdependent. The view that neither Gnosticism nor Platonism is a derivative of the other, but are interdependent by mutual influence and cross-fertilization; they are

complementary interpretations and solutions to a common cultural and religious problematic.

A. Gnosticism as Platonism

The attempt to assess Gnosticism as a derivative of Platonic philosophy has a lengthy history. This attempt seems to have begun with the heresiologists Irenaeus and Hippolytus precisely in the late second century CE when the classical gnostic systems were flourishing in cities like Rome and Alexandria.

In his *Against Heresies* (*Adv. Haer.* II.14), Irenaeus asserts that the Valentinians plagiarized the descriptions of the aeonic denizens of their divine world (the Pleroma) and their genealogies from the theogonies of the comic poets, changing only the names.[5] He claims that they expropriated their notion of the primal principles Bythos, the Father, and Sige, his consort, from Homer's Oceanus and the various first principles (ἀρχαί) posited by the Presocratics. Their distinction between transcendent real (*pleromatic*) existences and immanent unreal (*kenomatic*) images or shadows is said to come from Democritus and Plato. Their notion that matter pre-exists the creative act comes from Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Plato, and their doctrine of the immutabilty of natures from the Stoics and others. Their doctrine of the formation of the Savior (Jesus) from all the Aeons is said to be an adaptation of Hesiod's Pandora, and from the Pythagoreans they borrowed the idea of the derivation of all things from numbers which in turn derive from the One.[6]

Hippolytus begins his *Refutation of All Heresies* by proposing to expose how the founders of the gnostic heresies appropriated most of their doctrines from Greek philosophy and religion (*Ref.* I.11). In his catalogue of heresies in *Ref.* V, Hippolytus points out various dependencies: the Naasenes on Homer, the poets, and the mysteries (*Ref.* I.11); the Peratae on Greek astrology (*Ref.* V.13 and 15); the Sethians on the Greek natural philosophers (οἱ φυσικοί), the Orphic rites and Homeric cosmology (*Ref.* V.20); and the gnostic Justin on Herodotus' legend of Heracles (*Ref.* V.25).

5. That is, the Valentinian Aeons Bythos, Sigê, Nous, Logos, and lower Aeons are drawn respectively from the theogonic Nyx, Chaos, Eros, and the δευτέροι θεοί of the *Timaeus*.

6. Viz. from the One (cf. the Valentinian Bythos) derive the pleromic groupings of the Aeons: "the dyad, tetrad, pentad and the rest."

It is the Valentinian teaching which Hippolytus singles out as a late derivative of the doctrine of Plato and Pythagoras.[7] In order to prove his point, Hippolytus presents in *Ref.* VI.21-29 an epitome of Pythagorean doctrine (said to have been originally introduced to the Greeks by the Egyptians) so as to facilitate understanding the Valentinian system, which differs from that of Pythagoras in names and numbers only (*Ref.* VI.21-22). He ascribes to Pythagoras the doctrine of the tetractys (*Ref.* VI.23), Plato's doctrine of the intelligible and sensible worlds (*Ref.* VI.24.1), Plato's (*sic.*; viz. Aristotle's) ten categories (*Ref.* VI.24.2-3), Empedocles' cosmogenesis by the interaction of Philia (love) and Neikos (strife; *Ref.* VI.25), certain contemporary astrological doctrines, and, of course, the *Symbola Pythagorica* (*Ref.* VI.27). Because of the structural similarity between these "Pythagorean" doctrines and the Valentinian teachings, Hippolytus concludes that the Valentinians are Pythagoreans and, by implication, Platonists, not Christians (*Ref.* V.29.1). In *Ref.* VI.37, Hippolytus explicitly equates Valentinus' system of divine principles with the famous arcanum of Plato's *Letter II* 312E: Plato's king is Valentinus' supreme *Bythos–Patêr–Proarchê*; the "second around the second" is Valentinus' *Horos* circumscribing the Pleroma; and the "third around the third" is the region below the Pleroma, i.e. the Kenoma. In the same passage, Hippolytus also identifies elements in a psalm of Valentinus with elements found in Platonic cosmological

7. It is a commonplace of the Graeco-Roman period that Plato and Pythagoras taught the same doctrine, even to the extent that all of Plato's thought (as understood in this period) was claimed for Pythagoras (cf. Nicomachus, *Eisagoge* I.1; XIII; Numenius, frg. 1 Leemans = frg. 24 des Places; Moderatus *apud* Porphyry, *Vita Pythag.* 53; Iamblichus, *Vita Pythag.* 127; Photius, *Bibliotheca cod.* 249). Perhaps Plato had prepared the way for this by insinuating that the opposition between limit and unlimited was based on Pythagorean tradition (*Philebus* 16C ff.). But once Aristotle (*Met.* A6, 987b26 f.) had said that Plato took over some of his fundamental doctrines from the Pythagoreans, the way was open to attribute nearly all of Plato's teaching to them (so P. MERLAN in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* [ed. A. H. ARMSTRONG; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 86). In *Ref.* VI.21.1-2 Hippolytus says Plato derived his impressions, especially those in the *Timaeus*, from Pythagoras. Nearly everyone took the Timaeus of Plato's dialogue to be the famous Pythagorean Locrean even though Plato never calls him a Pythagorean (so Merlan, *ibid.*, 86). In any case, the Neopythagorean Platonists of the first century are unified in claiming Plato's philosophy for Pythagoras and in understanding Pythagorean tradition along contemporary Platonic lines.

doctrine.[8] In *Ref.* VI.52, Hippolytus provides another epitome of Pythagorean doctrine (the generation of all things from the monad) to show the Valentinian Marcus' dependence upon Pythagoras. In Book VII, Hippolytus shows the dependence of yet other gnostic teachers on Greek philosophers: Basilides on Aristotle (*Ref.* VII.2; 14; 20-27); Marcion on Empedocles (*Ref.* VII.5,29-31); Cerdo on Empedocles (*Ref.* VII.10); and Apelles on the Stoic φυσικοί (*Ref.* VII.12). This process is completed in Book VIII, where the heresies of the Docetae and Monoïmus are respectively traced back to the Sophists and Pythagoras.

This interest in doctrinal dependence through both legitimate succession and illegitimate plagiarism was typical of Hippolytus' age. The Roman emperors, the prominent teachers of the various philosophical movements, Epicurean, Stoic, Peripatetic and Platonic, as well as prominent leaders of the early Church and heretics alike were all arranged into lists of authorized "successors." Philosophy and theology had become commentary on doctrines inherited from the great authorities of the past whose wisdom derived from even more remote and exotic cultures (the Egyptians, Persians, etc.) of even greater antiquity.

The vast openness of Graeco-Roman society with its mobility, multiple options, and individualism offered no obvious and unanimously acceptable purpose or meaning for one's life. Freed from habitual loyalty to time- and place-bound traditions, freed from the familiar, one had little choice but to search for purposes and meanings by rediscovering those same old traditions, which were found to be pregnant with redefinable meaning—if only one applied the proper interpretive technique. In the main, this technique was allegory. By this means, eclectic contemporary speculation could be shown to be rooted in and equivalent to the doctrines of the scriptures, prophets, poets and philosophers belonging to a culture where the essence of things was more clearly apparent, if only because it lay closer to the origins, and, by implication, to the original essence of things.

8. The psalm: "I see that all is suspended on spirit, / I perceive that all is wafted on spirit. / Flesh is suspended on soul, and soul depends on the air. / Air is suspended from aether, / From the depths come forth fruits, / From the womb comes forth a child." The Platonic interpretation: flesh is the matter suspended from the demiurgic soul, which in turn depends on the air (i.e., the lower Sophia outside the Pleromatic Limit), which in turn depends on ether (the upper Sophia within the Pleroma); the fruits produced from Bythos are all the Aeons.

In this way Greek culture as a whole could be traced back to older oriental peoples: Indians, Persians, Chaldaeans, Egyptians, and Hebrews. Thus not only could one claim Plato's philosophy for Pythagoras, but one could press its origin further back yet: Numenius in the second century could call Plato an "atticizing Moses" (frg. 10 Leemans = frg. 8 des Places): "it is necessary to connect Plato's affirmations with the doctrines of Pythagoras by appealing to reputable people and adducing their initiations, doctrines and consecrations (ἱδρύσεις) celebrated in agreement with Plato, which things were all established by the Brahmans, Jews, Magians and Egyptians" (frg. 9 Leemans = frg. 1 des Places).[9] The same tendency is to be seen in the prologue (Bk. 1) of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Famous Philosophers*, which opens with theories about the ancient barbarian origins of Greek philosophy, singling out the Magians, Chaldaeans, Assyrians, Indians, Druids and Egyptians. The same kind of theory is also expounded by Celsus in his *True Doctrine* (Origen, *contra Celsum* I.2; I.14-16; I.80). This view, that Plato had derived his theology through Pythagoras from even more ancient worthies, lasted through the early Renaissance; there we find Ficino, translator of Plato's rediscovered dialogues, saying that the Platonic doctrine of the Hermetic literature was transmitted to Plato from the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus and Moses the Jew.[10] Of course this

9. See the discussions of Numenius by E. NORDEN, *Agnostos Theos. Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 6th edition 1974), 72-73, 109; W. BOUSSET, *Göttingen Gelehrte Anzeigen* 176 (1914), 716-717; "Numenios," in *Friedrich Ueberweg's* Grundriss *der Geschichte der Philosophie des Altertums*, ed. M. Heinze (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1923-28), 12.520 f.; H.-Ch. PUECH in *Mélanges Bidez* (Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves, vol. 2. Université libre de Bruxelles: Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales), vol. II, 747-749; F. CUMONT, *Lux Perpetua* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 344-345; R. BEUTLER in *Paulys Realencyclopädie* (Stuttgart: A. Druckenmuller, 1893-1980), Suppl., VII (1940), cols. 664-678; A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. I. *L'astrologie et les sciences occultes* (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1949) 19; vol. IV. *Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose* (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1954), 130-132; E. R. DODDS, "Numenius and Ammonius," in *Les Sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique V; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 4-11. Fragments collected in E.-A. LEEMANS, *Studie Over den Wijsgeer Numenius van Apamea met Uitgave der Fragmenten* (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1937) and É. DES PLACES, *Numénius: Fragments* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973).

10. Argumentum to "Pimander," in M. FICINO, *Opera Omnia* (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo, 1962), 1836. In this assertion, Ficino is merely following the opinions of

claim entails that Hermetic Gnosticism is regarded as Platonism and vice-versa, and what is more, that this form of Gnosticism was given preeminent formulation by Plato himself.

After the advent of historical critical scholarship had clarified the relation of later Platonism to Plato, as well as Plato's doctrinal relation to his religious and philosophical forebears, and had succeeded in dating ancient literature such as the Hermetic writings as well as much of surviving gnostic literature, it was commonly assumed that Gnosticism was Platonic or at least Hellenic at its core. At the end of the nineteenth century, Adolf von Harnack proposed the distinction between gnostic and catholic Christianity: the gnostic systems represent the acute secularizing or Hellenizing of Christianity, with the rejection of the Old Testament, while the Catholic system represents a gradual process of the same kind but with the conservation of the Old Testament. Gnosticism is an attempt "to transform Christianity into a theosophy, a revealed metaphysics and philosophy of history (with complete disregard for its Jewish, Old Testament foundations) through the use of [distorted] Pauline ideas and under the influence of the Platonic spirit."[11] As late as 1954, Carl Schneider, while admitting the influence of Iranian themes and motifs, understands Gnosis as belonging "to the history of Late Platonism as one of its bifurcations," a system whose spirit is "purely Greek and in the main Platonic."[12]

Since the late nineteenth century, however, Gnosticism has by and large been attributed to the late antique syncretistic combination of a basically "oriental" (i.e. non-Greek, e.g., Egyptian, Babylonian and especially Iranian) cosmological dualism with Greek metaphysical conceptuality. This view, typical of the history-of-religions school of research, understands the key to the essence of Gnosticism to lie in the discovery of its cultural and religious origins. Because it regards the oriental contribution as the decisive component, Gnosticism is basically an oriental religious system clothed in Greek dress. This view is typical of scholars associated with the European history-of-religions (*religionsgeschichtliche*) school, such as R. Reitzenstein, H. H. Schaeder, W. Bousset, G. Widengren and others.

Lactantius (*Div. inst.* I.6; IV.6; VIII.18) which are echoed to some extent by Augustine (*De civ. Dei*, XVIII.29; yet Moses is said to antedate Hermes).

11. A. von HARNACK, *History of Dogma*, Vol. I. Eng. transl. 3rd German ed. 1894 by W. Buchanan (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 229.

12. C. SCHNEIDER, *Geistesgeschichte des antiken Christentums*, Bd. I (Munich: Beck. 1954), 268.

Since the discovery in December 1945 of the thirteen Coptic gnostic codices near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi, the thesis of oriental origins has generally continued to hold the field, except that the main component of this orientalism is increasingly traced to some form of heterodox or esoteric Judaism, whether it be the thought of Philo, speculation on the divine throne and chariot of God originating in the post-exilic period, the dualism of certain Qumran literature, Samaritan speculation, speculation on the figure of the hypostatized Wisdom of Yahweh, the product of disappointed apocalyptic hopes, or some popular combination of these on the part of socially marginalized Jews.

At the same time there is a very definite trend towards abandoning the attempt to arrive at the essence of Gnosticism by the delineation of its origins. This trend is due largely to the epochal impact of Hans Jonas' study of Gnosticism which appeared in 1934. Jonas replaced the attempt at a diachronic, genetic analysis of Gnosticism with a synchronic, phenomenological analysis of Gnosticism ("Gnosis") as a religious movement in its own right that was typical of Graeco-Roman religiosity as a whole. Although Jonas favors mainly oriental antecedents to Gnosticism as "the most original expression of the *Daseinsverfassung* [characterization of human existence] in question," this derivation plays no part in his existentialist-ontological analysis of Gnosticism.[13] Contemporary researchers of Gnosticism generally agree that Gnosticism is not a direct product of Christianity, Judaism or specific Hellenic religions, but that each had helped shape the various gnostic systems.[14] It has even been claimed that Gnosticism is "generally underivable."[15]

In spite of the emphasis on the autonomous genesis of Gnosticism, there have, of course, continued to be proponents of the view that the

13. H. JONAS, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, 3rd ed., Part I (Forschungen zur religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments n.F. 33; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934 [reprinted 1966]), 8.

14. So H. J. SCHOEPS, "Urchristentum und Gnosis," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13-18 Aprile 1966*, ed. U. Bianchi (Supplements to Numen 12; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 529 and "Zur Standortsbestimmung der Gnosis," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 81 (1965), col. 420; R. McL. WILSON, *The Gnostic Problem* (London, 1958), 218 and in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 697.

15. H.-M. SCHENKE, "Das Problem des Beziehung zwischen Judentum und Gnosis," *Kairos* 7 (1965), 125.

roots of Gnosticism are to be found in Graeco-Hellenistic thought and religion, and in Platonism in particular. Thus the late A. D. Nock, by transforming S. Pétrement's phrase "un platonisme romantique," characterized Gnosticism as a "Platonism run wild."[16] By "Platonism" Nock understood that later Platonism which held that life in the body implies a descent and an imprisonment and that evil is inherent in matter; that one's goal is to escape yonder as quickly as possible (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176A-B); that there are imperfect supernatural powers; and that the Supreme Being is wholly remote (not necessarily alien) from the world of sense experience and its creator. This later Platonism, together with later Judaism and its speculation on angels or on the first six chapters of Genesis, helped to shape a "climate of opinion" in which a gnosticizing "mythopoeic faculty" could build incipiently gnostic motifs into various gnostic systems. There was no pre-Christian universal religion known as Gnosticism; rather only "gnosticoid" raw materials which were caused to take certain definite shapes by the Christian attempt to interpret the cosmic significance of the dying and rising Jesus regarded as the heavenly Lord. Gnosticism was "the aggregate of a series of individual responses to the religious situation" of the times.[17] In short, Gnosticism is a post-Christian syncretistic aggregate whose main components are esoteric Judaism and Platonism; the Platonic component is strongest in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the treatises of the Hermetic corpus (especially the *Poimandres* and *Korê Kosmou*), and various treatises in the Nag Hammadi gnostic library. Nock's syncretistic thesis is the very sort of hypothesis that Hans Jonas had criticized as assuming an "alchemy of ideas."

Although the theory of a vague syncretism must be rejected as heuristically unfruitful, Nock's stress on individual gnostic systems rather than upon Gnosticism in general is a better approach, particularly when one comes to assess the Platonic contribution to Gnosticism. The tendency of the Church Fathers and of Platonists through the Renaissance to see in gnostic doctrines a form of Platonism is valid with respect to specific Platonic elements in specific gnostic systems. But Gnosticism cannot be regarded as a "Platonism run wild" any more than it can be regarded as

16. A. D. NOCK, *Early Gentile Christianity and its Hellenistic Background* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), xiv; cf. S. PÉTREMENT, "La notion de gnosticisme," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 65 (1960), 385-421.

17. A. D. NOCK, "Gnosticism," *Harvard Theological Review* 57 (1964), 273.

fundamentally Platonic or even later Platonic. Platonism was a contributory cause for the rise of various gnostic systems, perhaps even a necessary causal factor, but certainly not a sufficient one.

B. Platonism as Incipient Gnosticism

Since the Messina conference on the origins of Gnosticism was held in 1966, thereby spawning a concentrated international effort to investigate the gnostic phenomenon and its origins, many fruitful observations have been made about the specific Platonic contribution to gnostic systems. In the volume of papers arising from that conference, *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina 13-18 Aprile 1966; Testi e discussioni publicati a cura di Ugo Bianchi* (Supplements to Numen XII; Leiden, 1967), several essays touch on the relation of Gnosticism to Platonism. Both R. Crahay and P. Boyancé point to Plato as the source for Gnosticism's philosophical terminology as well as a significant part of its metaphysical categories and structures, perhaps through the intermediary of Alexandrian Platonists, especially Philo of Alexandria. This claim is not to be oversimplified, as H. H. Schaeder had done in 1928,[18] to say merely that the inner content of Gnosticism is generally non-Greek while the metaphysical verbal clothing is Greek and often Platonic. Indeed, as H. W. Drijvers observes:

> In Gnosticism, "gnosis" is no formal philosophy of the Platonic kind, but a means of escaping existence; no knowledge of the world, but an attempt to anticipate the undoing of the world's creation. However strongly Gnosticism may make the impression of being a philosophy, in essence it is not so, but an attempt to render all philosophy superfluous—it is first and foremost a "secret revelation."[19]

In the Messina volume, P. Boyancé has demonstrated that the role of the planetary Archons in many gnostic systems is easily derivable from Plato's statements concerning the "younger deities" (νέοι θεοί; *Timaeus* 41-42) to whom the entirely good demiurge of the world soul assigns the task of making the mortal, irrational part of the human soul and the bod-

18. H. H. SCHAEDER, *Der Mensch in Orient und Okzident: Grundzüge einer eurasiatischen Geschichte*, ed. G. Schaeder (Munich: R. Piper, 1960), 107-109.

19. H. W. DRIJVERS, "The Origins of Gnosticism as a Religious and Historical Problem," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 22 (1968), 342.

ies in which it and the immortal, rational soul will reside.[20] On the road from Plato to Gnosticism, these younger deities reappear in Philo as God's "fellow workers" (ἑτερῶν συνεργῶν; *De opificio mundi* 74-75), or as innumerable "powers" (δυνάμεις, *De fuga et inventione* 69; *De confusione linguarum* 168-173) who assist the Creator in making the mortal and less virtuous aspects of the soul and created order. While Plato had called these subordinate deities "ruling deities" (θεοί ἄρχοντοι, *Statesman* 270D, or simply ἄρχοντες, *Laws* X 903B) who rule over all parts of the world, Philo compares them to the archons of a city (*De specialibus legibus* I.113). These observations strongly suggest that the motif of the evil planetary archons in Gnosticism may not derive from Babylonian/Persian astrology, but rather directly from the Platonic tradition. As Boyancé points out, however: "But the role [of the archontic younger deities], which is in Plato positive and strives as much as possible for the good, becomes ... in Gnosticism marked with a negative sign ... this negative sign is definitely the most original thing about Gnosticism."[21]

R. Crahay includes not only Plato, but also Orphism among Hellenic factors that contributed to the rise of Gnosticism.[22] Orphism has often been regarded as an incipiently gnostic religious movement.[23] While Crahay sees the full-blown Orphic mythologies preserved by Damascius in the late fifth century as late and somewhat untrustworthy evidence for gnostic antecedents, he regards the following basic gnosticizing Orphic themes to be antecedents of Gnosticism: the existential notion of alienation, especially of soul from body; the cosmic drama of the soul; and the idea that salvation is bound up with the knowledge of a doctrine, an Orphic gnosis. These themes are present in Presocratic times, principally in the teachings of Empedocles and Pherecydes, and reflected in the poetry of Pindar. It was Plato, however, who gave these themes their classic expression: "To the extent that second and third century gnostics

20. P. BOYANCÉ, "Dieu cosmique et dualisme: Les archontes et Platon," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 340-386.

21. "Dieu cosmique et dualisme," 384 f.

22. R. CRAHAY, "Éléments d'une mythopée gnostique dans la Grèce classique," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 323-338.

23. E.g., A. DIETERICH, *Abraxas: Studien zur Religionsgeschichte* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1891), 149 f; F. LEGGE, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity from 330 BC to 330 AD* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1964 [2 vols. in 1; first published 1915]), 121-148.

had to borrow their philosophical vocabulary, it is through Plato, but at the cost of new distortions, that they reaped a Greek heritage."[24]

Other scholars have identified various separate Orphic themes that prepared the path for Gnosticism. Thus G. Sfameni-Gasparro derives the well-known gnostic motif of the "call from the depths" from the Orphic teaching of Empedocles.[25] G. Quispel[26] suggests that the Orphic myth of the dismemberment of Zagreus constituted a fundamental departure towards Gnosticism understood as a doctrine whose basic teaching concerns a "tragic break in the deity" and the deity's subsequent attempts to reintegrate its fallen members.

Ugo Bianchi, editor of the Messina papers, has characterized Orphism as a Gnosticism "*ante litteram*."[27] Orphism bears a number of close similarities to Gnosticism, some of which Bianchi lists:[28] the idea of the fallen divine soul subjected to the (demiurgical) Strife (νεῖκος) clothed with and buried in the body (Empedocles, frg. 118-121, 125, 126, Diels); the migration of the soul, its exile/punishment in the body and world (Pherecydes, frg, 7 Diels; Empedocles, frg. 31, 115 Diels; Kern, *Orph. Frg.* 32, 224, 229; Orphic gold tablets); the kinship (συγγένεια) of soul with deity (*Orph. Frg.* 32 Kern), its reintegration into the divine world (Orphic gold tablets; Empedocles, frg. 17 Diels; *Orph. Frg.* 32a Kern); the primal fracture of an original world-unity and its final reintegration (cf. Empedocles, frgs, 31, 60 Diels; Plato, *Symposium* 189D ff.); the realization of the divine self in man (*passim*); the penchant for reinterpreting old authoritative traditions (not necessarily a *Protestexegese* as in Gnosticism); esoteric speculation, asceticism, adoption of contemporary philosophy and magic; an attraction to revelation, purificatory ritual and conventicle life; and finally, the problematic or even negative role of the demiurge (cf. the Eris of Empedocles, the Dionysiac myth of the Titans, the "trickster" figure of Prometheus).

24. R. CRAHAY in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 337.

25. "L'invocatione dal basso: Il dissordine del mundo e il grido dei persequitati," in *Studi di Storia Religiosa della Tarda Antiquità*, ed. U. Bianchi (Messina: Pubblicati dalla cattedra di storia delle religioni dell'Università di Messina, 1968), 91-107.

26. *Makarius, das Thomasevangelium und das Lied von der Perle* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum XV; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 67-68.

27. "Le problème des origines du gnosticisme," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 20-23.

28. "Le problème des origines du gnosticisme et l'histoire des religions," *Numen* XII (1965), 161-178.

As the articles of Boyancé and Bianchi point out, many of these incipiently gnostic Orphic themes were made available to late antiquity by way of Plato and the Platonic tradition, and thence found their way into Gnosticism. Hans Jonas has commented insightfully on this process in an excursus to the first volume of *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen, 1934, third edition 1964, 251-254). Affirming that Plato had received from Orphism a certain dualistic anticosmism as well as a certain sacral terminology and placed these in the service of philosophy, Jonas observes that the autonomic inertia of portions of this Orphic tradition and attitude had the effect of shifting the location of the human soul as the object of philosophical study (τὸ λογικὸν καὶ θεωρητικὸν μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς) from this world to a transcendent realm (the realm of the ideas and the cosmic soul). In this rationalizing process, the old sacral terminology attained the freedom of metaphorical application. An older enthusiastic, ecstatic (Orphic) element thus achieved a transposition (*Aufhebung*) into a new philosophical setting, which through Plato's authority injected a profound otherworldly pathos and manner of speaking into the prevailing Greek scientific spirit of world-consent and rationality. In this respect, Plato cannot be counted as a Gnostic, since his dualism is one of dependence, not alienation: the beyond is not alien to this world, but paradigmatic of this world, which is its best possible imitation. But as time passed and Plato's authority grew, the seed of Orphic anti-cosmic dualism and enthusiasm underlying his philosophy always held the way open for a return to that pre-philosophical enthusiasm insofar as Platonic language was used by his successors to illuminate man's existential and religious situation. All that was needed to bring this pre-philosophical (mythical) seed to recrudescence was the new religious situation typical of late antiquity (i.e., the "gnostic syndrome"). The religious coloring Plato gave to antique philosophy made inevitable a philosophical coloring to late antique religion; in Jonas' words: "Insofar as Plato stylized philosophy as an ostensible religion, so he enabled a later religion to be stylized as an ostensible philosophy".[29] Once Plato's dualistic, sacral speech was inherited by Gnosticism, it found itself on ground located nearer to the (Orphic) soil from which it originally had sprung, than to Plato's dialectic philosophy. Hence the

29. "Indem Platon die Philosophie als Scheinreligion stilisierte, ermöglichte er einer späteren Religion die Stilisierung als Schein-philosophie," *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* I, 253.

uncanny popularity and religious authority of Plato in the later Hellenistic age; hence its "Neoplatonic" reinterpretation: it had become the "hieratic speech" (Reitzenstein's term in *Poimandres*[30]) of the age.

Although Jonas stresses the independent character of Gnosticism as a religion in its own right, he certainly does not deny that it had its antecedents. But rather than tracing the origins of certain doctrines, myths, language styles, organizations, rituals, and forms of piety, Jonas is concerned with describing the rise of a certain existential disposition (*Daseinshaltung*) towards self and world which itself gave rise to the gnostic religion. The central characteristic of this existential disposition is that its expression in Gnosticism comes in the form of a myth. This myth is understood to be a primal objectivation of an existential stance which seeks its own truth in a total view of things. The stance underlying Gnosticism is one of alienation and revolt from one's world of lived experience, and the resulting myth is always of the "eschatological" or "salvational" character that flourished in the Hellenistic Near Eastern world of the early Christian era.[31] In these myths, passionately experienced antithetical dualisms between man and world and world and God are explained by a genetic mythology which begins with a doctrine of divine transcendence in its original purity. It then traces the genesis of a world from some (willful) primordial disruption of this blessed state—a loss of divine integrity—which leads to the emergence of lower powers who become (ignorant) rulers of this world. Then, as a crucial episode in the drama, the myth recounts the creation and early fate of humanity, in whom further conflict becomes centered. The final theme, in fact the implied theme throughout, is human salvation, which is more than merely human salvation, as it involves the overcoming and eventual dissolution of the cosmic system and thus is "the instrument of reintegration for the impaired godhead itself, or, the self-saving of God."[32] This form of myth represents the very large group of myths which Jonas calls "Syrian-Egyptian;" it is gnostic in origin and embraces the Christian gnostic systems described by the heresiologists, most of the Nag

30. R. REITZENSTEIN, *Poimandres: Studien zur griechish-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1904), 304.

31. H. JONAS, "Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought," in *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 294.

32. H. JONAS, "Delimitation of the Gnostic Phenomenon—Typological and Historical," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 94.

Hammadi and other Coptic gnostic treatises, the Hermetic treatises *Poimandres*, *On Rebirth*, and the *Korê Kosmou* (i.e., treatises 1, 13, and frg. 24), the gnostic opponents of Plotinus, as well as the metaphysical systems of Origen and Plotinus themselves. The other branch of gnostic myths, the "Iranian" type (especially Manichaeism), involves a dualism of two originally opposed transcendent powers. It was not originally gnostic, but underwent a gnostic transformation around the time of the Christian era, becoming distorted by the influence of an existential disposition and ontology originally alien to it. In the Syrian-Egyptian system, the creator of the world is not identical with the highest deity, but is subordinate to it and even derived from it by a tragic split in the original divinity. This split leads to the ignorant, even presumptuous creation of a tragic world which turns out to be an illicit and bungled imitation or counterfeit copy of the higher divine world from which it is sundered. The history of creation is generally emanationist, a devolution of the originally unified and pure being of the godhead into an unstable diversity of various divine and cosmic powers of the sort often found in the Alexandrian scheme of emanative speculation culminating in Plotinus. The specifically gnostic element in this emanationism is a catastrophic instability that breaks out at some point in the otherwise smooth, orderly, and gradual unfolding of ever lower levels of being from an ultimate divine source as depicted by most Neoplatonist authors. Unlike most Platonic cosmogonic systems, Gnosticism depicts the relationship of the lower created world to the higher divine world as one of disruption and opposition, not dependence.

The fact that Jonas includes Platonists (Origen and Plotinus) within the Syrian-Egyptian type of Gnosis is not surprising. Like such Gnostics as Valentinus and the authors of the *Poimandres* and of the *Apocryphon of John*, they definitely wanted to offer speculative systems in which:[33]

> ... everything hangs together and one chain of reasoning leads from first principles to last consequences. The very idea of such a system was rooted in an axiomatic conviction of the time, namely that there is a chain of being which the chain of reasoning does no more than reproduce. There can be such a system of thought because being itself forms a system; and as the order of being, so is the order of demonstration: the 'first' in theory is also the first in reality, the actual beginning of things.

33. H. JONAS, "The Soul in Gnosticism and Plotinus," in *Philosophical Essays*, 325. In fact, this is an implementation of Parmenides' ancient dictum: "To be and to think are one and the same" (τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι, frg. 3 D.-K. = Plotinus, *Ennead* V, 1, 8,17).

The chain of being is vertical, suspended from the highest point, creating a hierarchy of descending grades of goodness, beauty and perfection. Creation and becoming is a downward movement away from the perfection of the source into utter distance, otherness and even alienation from the source. Yet this downward movement can be followed by a reversed, upward movement of the lower to the higher which serves to undo the creative descent and lead to a goal of return and reunion. The descent ("procession," πρόοδος) from the perfect integrity and unity of the source brings into being a plurality or manifold of being which is regarded as a deficiency, even a "fall," while the subsequent ascent ("reversion," ἐπιστροφή) is a reintegration of the many into the one, and is regarded as a restoration, even a redemption. The extreme polarization that arises between the opposite ends of the scale of being, between the single deity and the lowest realm of the material world, was coupled with a certain anticosmic pessimism and tendency to withdraw from this world.

This coupling posed the question of how this changing world of multiplicity and materiality with its flaws could have arisen from the absolute self-perfection, aseity and permanence (μονή) of the transmundane source. What is the origin of the cosmic deficiency? The gnostic answer was the myth of the descent or "fall" of the soul from the divine into the cosmic realm (symbolized in Valentinian myth as the Fall of Sophia, or in Hermetic myth as the narcissistic descent of the primal Anthropos as in the *Poimandres*, etc.). The soul is the symbol of a faulted existence and is the product of deficiency understood as a fall resulting from the willful, presumptuous act of an originally noetic being who overreaches its proper station in an illicit attempt to extend its knowledge by seeking to unite with some being other than itself, whether higher or lower. Soul is a sunken form of Mind or Spirit, from which the cosmos and its deficiency originates: "the cosmos as such is the prime and eminent product of that metaphysical stage of defection on which original Being became 'psychic'—i.e., on which it deteriorated to the psychic mode."[34]

Jonas is concerned to show that not only the emanative systems of various Gnostics, but also those of Origen and Plotinus, are character-

34. H. JONAS, *ibid.*, 328.

ized by a similar structure and a similar answer to the problem of the origin of cosmic deficiency.[35] For Origen, individual souls are a fallen condition of pre-existent minds who fall away from God by exercising the freedom of the will. God has no choice but to create our world as a way of ordering this potentially chaotic condition of freedom. For Plotinus (especially *Ennead* III, 7 [45], 11), soul is a temporalized form of eternal noetic being, and results from an inquietude, an unwillingness to remain in the concentrated wholeness of changeless being and pure intelligence. By this act of presumptuous self-will (τόλμα, τόλμη),[36] soul thus produces temporal succession, movement, and ultimately the sensible world in imitation of the intelligible. Universal soul thus takes on the creative task Plato's *Timaeus* had assigned to the demiurge. This element of independent voluntarism characteristic of any actor injects an element of myth or drama into an otherwise deductive ontological system where the created manifold normally proceeds by an involuntary overflow of plenitude. Ordinarily the status of each level of being save that of the single source is to be defined by its relation to the next higher level. But the universal soul stands out by being directed also to that which is lower than itself; so also the human soul must decide between the lower and the higher.

This burden of choice with its potential for ambiguity, ambivalence, and sense of faultedness interrupts and causes a potentially tragic fissure in an otherwise strictly deductive metaphysics. For this reason, these late Platonic systems are akin to and are to be understood in terms of contemporary gnostic answers to similar problems. Thus, the systems of certain later Platonists of the second through the fourth centuries are to be regarded as part of a general pattern of speculation preeminently expressed and developed in Gnosticism. Even though these Platonists

35. See esp. *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, Vol. II, Part 1: Von der Mythologie zur mystischen Philosophie (Göttingen: Vandenheock & Ruprecht, 1954). Part 2, which was to treat Plotinus, did not appear. But the basic outlines of his approach to Plotinus may be seen in his essays: "The soul in Gnosticism and Plotinus," (*op. cit.*, notes 31-33 above), "Plotin über Ewigkeit und Zeit: Interpretation von *Enn.* III 7," in *Politische Ordnung und menschliche Existenz: Festgabe für E. Voeglin 60. Geburtstag*, ed A. Dempf *et al.* (Munich: Beck, 1962), 295-319; "Plotins Tugendlehre: Analyse und Kritik," in *Epimeleia: Die Sorge der Philosophie um den Menschen*, ed. F. Wiedemann (Munich: A. Pustet, 1964), 143-173.

36. A Pythagorean term for the Dyad; cf. Anatolius *apud* <Iamblichus>, *Theologoumena Arithmeticae* 7.19 de Falco.

opposed Gnosticism, especially what they perceived to be its elitism and its excessive devaluation of the created order, the structure of their thought betrays their true, even if unconscious, commonality with them. If, with Jonas, one understands this system-building tendency to have originated in gnostic (especially of the Syrian-Egyptian branch) circles, then, even taking into account differences of attitude, mood and expression, one can call later Platonism a form of gnostic thought. More precisely:[37]

> ... without Gnosis, without Gnosticizing influences, Plotinus would not have become the Platonist that he was ... although it is also true that without Platonic influences, the Gnostics would not have become what they were. One cannot get by with a simple combination of classical entities such as Platonism plus Stoicism on the one hand and ancient oriental plus Judaic conceptuality, and possibly Christian revelation, on the other; instead, however the mechanism of transmission may have been, one must speak of a "gnostic" conceptual climate in which it was possible for the mythmakers of the second century like Valentinus and Plotinus, the great systematic philosopher of the third century, to speak of creative presumption (τόλμη) in the same sense.

Jonas' term "conceptual climate" is very close to Nock's (*supra*) term "climate of opinion." For Nock there was prior to Christianity a gnostic "state of mind," but no gnostic "system" (which only arose as a result of a syncretism of Judaism and Hellenism). For Jonas, the system was an original gnostic contribution. Gnosticism is at root the system-building tendency of late antiquity, and the great gnostic systems of the second century as well as the system of Neoplatonism are its offspring and major exponents.

C. Gnosticism and Later Platonism as Interdependent

The notion of the existence of a conceptual climate in late antiquity which is based on an existential disposition of alienation from the world and God seems to have gained general acceptance among most scholars. In this gnostic climate or conceptual environment, individual concepts and motifs that are mediated to it by tradition, be it Platonic, Judaic or Iranian, undergo a "pseudomorphosis" in which an enduring structure is filled with new content, such that their new connotations are scarcely capable of being genetically traced to previous ones. The texts produced

37. H. JONAS in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo*, 214.

in this environment, whether philosophical, apocalyptic, or gnostic, serve merely as indices to or exponents of a subsurface and anonymous conceptual current or trajectory. The attempt to trace genetic relationships of prior and posterior, of source, of cause and effect—while possible in some cases—is not to be regarded as representing any historical state of affairs. Many different surface structures can represent the same subsurface deep structure.

Recently, the relationship of Gnosticism and Platonism has received the attention of philologists and historians of philosophy who tend toward re-emphasizing diachronic considerations and genetic dependencies, seeing both movements as different but similar manifestations of a deeper conceptual undercurrent or worldview. Thus Gnosticism is not phenomenologically reduced to Platonism (or to a syncretism of Judaic and Hellenic motifs), nor is Platonism reduced to Gnosticism, but each tends to be treated as an index to a single way of construing the world and interpreting its received symbols and traditions, be they of mythical or of philosophical character.

In 1953, W. Theiler published a survey of the main philosophical and theological thought of the Graeco-Roman period, "*Gott und Seele in kaiserzeitlichen Denken.*"[38] Characteristic of the thought of the period is a series of oppositions: the demiurge of the sensible world vs. the unknown, unlimited God; the rise of evil vs. divine providence; the compulsion of fate vs. freedom; and the descent of the soul vs. its reascent. Other dominant conceptions are the kinship of the transcendent God with humankind, hostility against the body, and a general acosmicism. The metaphysical world-picture of Philo of Alexandria can be hierarchically schematized (left to right in the direction of increasing transcendence):

Cosmos	Soul	*Dynameis*	God
Becoming		*Logoi*	

Within the Platonic school tradition a similar scheme is found among philosophers traditionally associated with the "school of Gaius,"[39]

38. In *Recherches sur la tradition platonicienne* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique III; Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1955), 66-80; reprinted in W. THEILER, *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1966), 104-123.

39. A construct, originated in 1906 by T. Sinko, whose plausibility is severely questioned by J. M. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B. C. to A. D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977; rev. edition with a new afterword, 1996), xiv, 377-378, 340.

namely Albinus, Apuleius, Maximus of Tyre and Hippolytus. Gaius' contemporary, Plutarch of Chaeronea, seems to represent a similar ordering of metaphysical entities, only with a stronger opposition between the left and the right sides of the row:

Duality	Movement	Order	Unity
Matter	Evil World Soul	Mind	God
	Ahriman	Oromazda	
	Typhon	Osiris	

The rift between the high God and the demiurge is complete by the time of Numenius of Apamea:

Duality	Lower Soul	Demiurge	Unity
Matter	Desire	Second God	First God
		Second Mind	First Mind

To be compared is the ideal type of gnostic scheme, that of the Valentinians, in which the demiurge has been displaced to the left side:

Matter	Psyche	Pneuma	Bythos
Devil	Demiurge	Sophia	Good God

This analogy between the philosophical world picture of imperial times and the gnostic world-picture can be explained in three characteristic ways:

> I) Philosophy is disguised Gnosis, a pseudomorphosis [the thesis of Jonas] ... 2) Gnosis is degraded philosophy: philosophical, mainly Platonic, structural elements have been superimposed upon an obscure, oriental mythical foundation. 3) Philosophy and Gnosis are both to be explained on the basis of the same social and spiritual tensions typical of the Roman imperial period. ... Perhaps numbers 2 and 3 are to be combined.[40]

Theiler recognizes both non-Greek (the aeon-mythology) and Greek (the myths of Plato) mythical components in those gnostic systems (especially of Basilides and Valentinus) whose structure and conceptuality borrow heavily on Greek philosophical traditions. A bridge between gnostic and Platonic cosmogonical narratives is offered principally by

40. W. THEILER, *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus*, 111.

pagan gnostic literature, especially the Hermetica (supposed to have been known at the beginning of the second century by Plutarch and Albinus and certainly later by Lactantius and Augustine) but also the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Such literature is a product of a generally anticosmic *Proletarianplatonismus* which is concerned to offer a soteriology dressed up in pseudo-scientific terminology.

Concerning Plotinus' relation to Gnosticism, Theiler points out that both speak of an unknown highest One far removed from the cosmos toward which all gnosis strives (cf. *Ennead* VI, 7, 36,3), of the fall of the soul owing to its presumption (τόλμα) or drive for independence, of its ascent above the cosmos toward the One, and of the fate (εἱμαρμένη) of men bound in the body and the freedom of the intellect. Although his distinctions between the levels of being are not as sharp as the radical gnostic discontinuities, the structure of Plotinus' hypostases is similar:

Matter	Soul	Intellect	One
Shadow of the	Movement	Idea	The Good
higher Light	Deed	Beauty	

All the thinkers of the period exhibit the problem of the duality between God and the world: the Gnostics and the Neoplatonists as well as such major Christian theologians as Origen, Clement and Augustine. The last three tend away from a substantial dualism towards an ethical dualism in which the human is an alien in the world, not so much by nature as by choice or defection, because the creator of this world is essentially good and the world is a product of his fiat.

Theiler was apparently unaware of an earlier essay by C. J. De Vogel in which she, in a very similar vein, points out the parallel between the four-level metaphysics of Plotinus and the structure employed by the Valentinians and the Hermetic *Poimandres*.[41] Her general conclusion is that these gnostic systems, together with the thought of Philo, Plutarch and Numenius, show that Plotinus did not invent the doctrine of four levels of being, but gave scientific shape and deductive rigor to a previously existing metaphysic.

41. "On the Neoplatonic Character of Platonism and the Platonic Character of Neoplatonism," *Mind* 62 (1953), 43-64, esp. 48-50.

The major work to pursue this line of thought initiated by Theiler and de Vogel is that of H. J. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*.[42] Krämer is concerned to demonstrate the inner integrity of Platonic metaphysical doctrine from the Old Academy, tracing its trajectory from the unwritten teaching of Plato through the system of Plotinus. Thus Platonism is an unbroken, unified tradition in which "the extant texts [treatises, compendia] are not themselves identified as the tradition, but rather as indices of a tradition whose anonymous, subterranean [i.e., oral] efficacy is to be taken seriously."[43] Thus the noological structure of Plotinus' metaphysics is said to be rooted in that of the Old Academy, particularly in Xenocrates[44] and, to a lesser extent, in the late Plato and his nephew Speusippus[45] as well as in the Aristotelian metaphysics of the intellect (*Nus-Metaphysik/Geistmetaphysik*).[46] In the development of Platonic speculation on first principles and on the metaphysics of thinking, the Gnostics play an important mediating and catalyzing role. In the Christian era about the time of the classical gnostic systems, one finds evidence for two different but related hierarchical metaphysical structures of being. One, characteristic of Xenocrates, Aristotle and most Middleplatonists, consists of three fundamental levels of reality:

Nous/Monas- first God	(transcendent forms = mathematicals)
World Soul	(movement)
Perceptibles	(material bodies)

Another metaphysical structure, characteristic of Plato's oral teaching, of Speusippus and of some Alexandrian Neopythagoreans, posits a level of reality beyond even these three, yielding four fundamental ontological levels:

One – superabundance	(ἀρχή beyond being)
Nous	(being, numbers, magnitudes)
Soul	(movement)
Perceptibles	(material bodies)

42. *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1964, 2nd ed., 1967).

43. KRÄMER, *ibid.*, 16 f.

44. "Die Nus-Monas als Weltmodel," *ibid.*, 21-119.

45. "Hen und Nus: Grund und Welt-model," Krämer, *op. cit.*, 193-338.

46. "Struktur und geschichtliche Stellung der aristotelischen Nus-Metaphysik" *ibid.*, 127-173.

The three- and four-level metaphysical structures arise at different times in the Platonic Tradition. Krämer outlines the general development somewhat as follows:[47] The origin of the Platonic *Geistmetaphysik* lies on the one hand in the Eleatic and Parmenidean doctrine (mediated to Plato by Eucleides and the Megarians) of the One (ἕν) as a primal principle conceived as a supreme intelligence (νοῦς or φρόνησις), and on the other hand in the Pythagorean doctrine of a world-immanent monadic mind (νοῦς-μονάς) which potentially contains the entire series of numbers (and thus also the world of geometrical, extended things). Taking Parmenides and Eucleides as his point of departure, in his unwritten teaching, Plato conceived the ground of the being of his transcendent world of ideas and paradigms to be a yet higher unity, conceivable only in negative terms, which lay beyond his own recently discovered intelligible realm of pure being. Among Plato's students, this teaching was at first adopted and systematized by his immediate successor Speusippus, but was subsequently rejected by Xenocrates and Aristotle, continuing for the next two centuries to live a sort of subterranean (perhaps oral and doxographical) existence until it found new expression in first-century BCE Alexandria and thereafter.

Xenocrates and Aristotle reacted against the excessive transcendentalism of the Speusippian system, and returned somewhat more closely to the older, less dualistic Megarian (the One = Intellect = the Good) and more immanently oriented Pythagorean (νοῦς-μονάς) conceptions by retracting the ultimate ground of being back into the intelligible realm of pure being itself. This restriction of transcendence to a single intelligible realm of pure being is to be regarded as part and parcel of the increasing interest in and adoption of the metaphysics of immanence and cosmospiety typical of Hellenistic philosophies such as Stoicism. The axis of Xenocrates' metaphysics was the immanent cosmos; he tended to restrict the transcendent sphere (τὰ ἔκτα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ)—along with his own systematizing interests—to the celestial region (ἡ αὐτοῦ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, frg. 5 Heinze). Aristotle, for his part, seriously questioned whether there was a transcendent world at all. After the metaphysically dry period of the Skeptical Academy, interest in—and religious thirst for—the transcendent, and the pre-Platonic quest for cosmological first principles returned in both Middleplatonism and Alexandrian Neopythagoreanism, and became a central occupation of the Platonism of the imperial period.

47. *Ibid.*, 386-389.

Since the time of Xenocrates and Aristotle, the higher transcendent world had been taken *en bloc*, with little attention given analyzing its subtle infrastructure. Yet, all the while, the autonomous momentum of the Speusippian conception of its ultimate, only negatively conceivable ground of being remained a latent possibility to be triggered by the new interest in the transcendent ground of a cosmos from which many thinkers of late Hellenistic times found themselves increasingly alienated. The main thinkers in whose thought this reemergence can be recognized are: the Neopythagoreans of first century BCE Alexandria, beginning with the speculative commentaries of Eudorus on Aristotle and of Philo (himself heavily influenced by Neopythagorean speculation) on the Jewish scriptures, and continued by gnostic theologians (especially Basilides and the Valentinians), the Church Fathers Clement and especially Origen, and the Neoplatonists beginning with Plotinus. Under this succession of thinkers—who are all equally representative indices of a deeper subterranean tendency in Platonism, beginning with Plato and Speusippus and resurfacing in first century Alexandria—an absolute, generally only negatively conceivable ground of being is gradually set apart and elevated from its expression in being and thought. On the other hand, the Xenocratean and Middleplatonic restriction of transcendent being to a single intellectual level did not die out, but lived on in the efforts of Christian Platonizing theologians such as Athanasius of Alexandria to overcome the excessively hierarchical subordinationism of Arianism and Nestorianism through the theological doctrines of modalism and the eventual *homoousios* solution of Nicea in 325 CE.

The Gnostics thus take on an important role for the Platonic tradition as indices and exponents of a re-emergent Speusippian four-level metaphysics whose ground is beyond being itself. Krämer accordingly treats the Gnostics under the category of pre-Plotinian systems along with the Older Academy (Plato's "On the Good" and Speusippus) and the "logos theologians" (principally Philo, Clement, and Origen). These systems exhibit the Speusippian structure:

The One	(ἕν)
Mind	(νοῦς [ἀριθμοί, τετράς, δεκάς, μεγέθη])
Soul	(ψυχή)
Bodies	(σώματα)

which is to be found also in the Neopythagorean system of Moderatus (*apud* Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum* 9.230,41-231,27 Diels) and in that related by Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* X.248E ff. Thus certain gnostic systems constitute an important link between the Platonism of the Older Academy and that of Plotinus. Krämer is concerned to distill out from them those Platonic philosophical ingredients which may have been grafted from the professional and popular philosophical environment onto the gnostic "fundamental experience" (*Grunderfahrung*) and consequently undergone a gnostic pseudomorphosis (here arguing against Jonas).[48] Evidence for this is to be found by isolating within gnostic sources specific Platonic philosophical doctrines and concepts by which the Gnostics systematically articulated their experience, rather than by positing an abstract system-building power or tendency as Jonas attempts to do. Recovering these ingredients will lead to the hypothetical reconstruction of a contemporary Platonic system paralleling that reflected in the gnostic sources, by which one may suppose that the metaphysical structure of the gnostic systems was influenced (not, be it noted, invented or erected) by philosophical doctrines. In this regard, Krämer breaks new ground in scholarship on Gnosticism, which has in the past tended to speak of genetic relationships of unilinear dependence upon sources rather than in terms of mutual influence.

Krämer claims that the earliest stages of the oldest gnostic systems (the Naasene psalm, the Simonians, and the Barbeloite and Ophite systems described by Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.23 and 29-30) exhibit a tripartition of the ontological levels—Intellect, Soul, and Chaos—in which the function of the world soul is represented by a feminine emanation (named Ennoia, Barbelo, Sophia) of the highest deity. This tripartition, typical of Middleplatonic metaphysics, is found also in the Baruch work cited by Justin (Hippolytus, *Ref.* V.20 f.), the Sethians (Hippolytus, *Ref.* V.19), the Peratae (Hippolytus, *Ref.* V.17.1-2) and in the *Poimandres* and other Hermetic tractates. In these systems, the transcendent, unmoved supreme deity is an intelligence that contains the ideas, while the second (moved) intelligence (the world soul) apprehends those ideas and in turn impresses them upon lower Matter. This distinction between moved and unmoved principles is to be found in Plutarch (*De Iside et Osiride* 373B, 374F, 376C), Alcinous <Albinus> (*Didaskalikos*

48. KRÄMER, *op. cit.*, 328-329.

XIV 69,33 ff.; X 165,3 Hermann), Numenius (frgs. 21, 24, 25 Leemans = 12, 15, 16 des Places), and in the *Chaldaean Oracles* (pp. 13-14, 74 Kroll = frgs. 5, 7, 8 des Places, and Psellus, *Hypotypôsis* p. 74 Kroll = 199,19-20 des Places). In general, "the various strongly gnostic traces in the Middleplatonic systems of the Chaldaean Oracles and Numenius, standing midway between gnostic Hermetic and pure Platonism, confirm that there were close ties between Middleplatonism and hellenizing proto-gnosticism."[49]

When one moves to the more developed—and presumably Alexandrian!—Basilidean and Valentinian systems, however, one encounters a pre-Plotinian four-level metaphysics in which a negatively conceived unitary principle beyond being and thinking is placed at the top of the metaphysical hierarchy. While G. Quispel[50] had compared the system of Basilides (Hippolytus, *Ref.* VII,20-27) with Middleplatonism, Krämer shows that, on the contrary, for Basilides the ground of being is not a thinking intelligence, but a purely negative principle to which thinking is only subordinate. The somewhat static Eleatic ontological structure of the Middleplatonists is here replaced by a dynamic process in which reality gradually unfolds in successive levels, a view that may owe itself to the influence of Judaeo-Christian conceptions of the world's creation (although for Basilides, the creative principle is not distinct from the creation, which instead emerges spontaneously from a world-seed). The Basilidean juxtaposition of the ground of being with a material principle (the world-seed) and the gradual unfolding of reality therefrom point back to a metaphysical system similar to that of certain Neopythagoreans, in which an original monad and a dyadic principle derived from the monad interact to produce the rest of reality. Such a Neopythagorean system as lies behind Basilides can also be claimed for Platonism, since the primal principles are indeed transcendent, but it is not typically Middleplatonic.[51]

Krämer gives an extensive survey of the Valentinian systems which evince very strong Platonic influences.[52] The basic metaphysical structure of the Valentinian system (2nd half of the second century) reported

49. KRÄMER, *op. cit.*, 234; cf. 63 ff. and 72 f.

50. "L'homme gnostique: La doctrine de Basilide," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 16 (1948), 89-139.

51. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 234-238.

52. *Ibid.*, 238-248.

by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I.1-8), Hippolytus (*Ref.* VI.29-36), and Clement's *Excerpts from Theodotus* is nearly identical with that of Moderatus of Gades (*apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.230,34-231,27 Diels; 2nd half of the first century):

Valentinians	*Moderatus*
Bythos	One (ἕν)
Aeons (Horos, Nous, etc.)	Forms (εἴδη)
World Soul (Demiurge)	World Soul
Matter (Hyle)	Hyle (bodies)

While the late first century system of Moderatus (discussed at length in Chapter 9), apparently based upon a Neopythagorean interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* (and perhaps also of the *Timaeus*), is headed by a monistic principle (i.e. by the One [ἕν]), Valentinian accounts of the highest principle appear in two forms: monistic[53] and dualistic.[54] Whether or not the highest Valentinian principle is to be regarded as a unitary Father or a syzygy of the Father and his Silence (like the rest of the Valentinian Aeons), it is in any case to be conceived as an utterly transcendent ground of being beyond being itself, comprehensible only in negative terms, and beyond intellect. Krämer notes the following features of the Valentinian four-level metaphysics:[55]

1. The Valentinian Demiurge is to be understood as the world soul of Plutarch and Numenius which can tend (in its mortal aspect) either toward Hyle or, in its immortal aspect, towards the highest point of the cosmos, the Ogdoad. Like the Middleplatonic (and ultimately Xenocratean) world soul, the Valentinian Demiurge is dyadic insofar as it has a theoretical (contemplative) function (directed upwards) and a demiurgic function (directed down to matter in an act of creation; cf. Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI.32). The same might be said of the Demiurge's mother Sophia who, although a pleromatic Aeon, nevertheless falls in a creative act, and is later rectified by the Savior in a noetic act (μόρφωσις ἡ κατὰ γνῶσιν). In this way, one can end up with both a higher

53. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.11.5; I.2.4 [Lipsius' monistic strand B in Ptolemaeus' system]; I.12.4; Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI 29.3-4; 38,5; *A Valentinian Exposition*, NHC XI,2.

54. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.1-8 (Lipsius' dualistic strand A in Ptolemaeus' system); I.11.5 (Valentinus); Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI.30.6-7; 31.3; 38.2; 38.5-6.

55. KRÄMER, *op. cit.*, 241-248.

(restored) Sophia and a lower (fallen) Sophia called Achamoth, who will later be restored into the Pleroma by Jesus the Savior, the Joint Fruit of the Pleroma.

2. The Aeons of the Valentinian Pleroma, separated by the boundary Horos from the Kenoma or Deficiency of the visible world (from the Ogdoad to Hyle), correspond to the world of Platonic ideas, conceived as paradigmatic virtues (σοφία, σύνεσις, πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη) and qualities (μίξις, ἕνωσις, ἀκίνητος etc.). Again, as in Platonism, the things outside the Pleroma are called images or shadows of the Pleromatic realities.[56]

3. The Valentinian arrangement of the Aeons into Tetrads, Decads and Dodecads is of Pythagorean origin, as is the Tetractys-like group of Bythos (the monad), his occasional consort Silence (Sigê, Ennoia, the Dyad), and the Son and his consort (Nous and Aletheia), from which the lower Sophia and her dwelling, the Ogdoad, are derived. Like the late first century BCE Neopythagorean system of Eudorus of Alexandria,[57] Hippolytus (*Ref.* V.29.2) conceives the Valentinian Bythos as the Pythagorean Monad followed by the syzygy (pair) of Nous and Aletheia as a dyad.[58] Similar Pythagorean speculation occurs abundantly in the Valentinian system of Marcus (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.15-16; Hippolytus, *Ref.* VI.49.1; 52.2) and frequently in the Nag Hammadi tractates (e.g., the *Gospel of Truth* [NHC I,3] and *A Valentinian Exposition* [NHC XI,2]).

Krämer concludes that the carefully worked-out system of Valentinian Aeons derives from a Pythagorean/Platonic doctrine of pure numbers (abstract groups of monads), which were personified by the Valentinians. In short, the Valentinian aeons are derived from Plato's ideal numbers.[59] Thus the Valentinian system contains a deposit, even if some-

56. εἰκόνες, Clem. Alex., *Excerpts from Theodotus* 32,1; *Stromateis* IV.13; 89.6; *imagines*, Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, II.7.1 & 3; shadows and images both occur in Nag Hammadi Codices I,4 and XI,2.

57. *Apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 181,10 ff. Diels: ἕν as ἀρχή, followed by ἕν = μονάς and an ἀόριστος δυάς conceived as a subordinate pair of στοιχεία.

58. *A Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2) calls Silence the Dyad. KRÄMER also points out similar Pythagorean speculation in the Carpocratian Epiphanes (Clem. Alex., *Stromateis* IV.23; 151.3-4; IV.25), the late Simonian *Megale Apophasis* (Hippolytus, *Ref.* IV.51.3; V.9.5; VI.14.6; 18.2 ff.), the Docetae (Hippolytus, *Ref.* VIII.8-9) and in Monoïmus' system (Hippolytus, *Ref.* VIII.12-14).

59. *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 249.

what encrusted and distorted, of philosophical concepts deriving from the Old Academy, and so is of great value in reconstructing the trajectory of the Platonic *Geistmetaphysik* from Plato to Plotinus.

Above all, the metaphysics of gnostic myths is not static, but dynamic, since it wishes to account for the rise of the present dualistic world-condition from its original pristine integrity. The move from original unity to derived multiplicity is generally conceived as the self-unfolding of a primal principle by a process of self-reflection, in which a thought emanates from and then objectivizes the primal source, producing the dyad of subject and object, the potential for multiplicity and indeed thinking (νοῦς) itself. From this, the Aeons take their rise as intelligent living beings, actualizations of the ideas of the divine primal thinking. The realm of Aeons thus corresponds to the Platonic transcendent realm of ideas.

Yet in these gnostic myths there is always a characteristic point where the orderly unfolding of the One into an intelligent manifold is shattered by a crisis in which the divine primal thinking becomes tragically alienated from its ground. In the Valentinian system, the drive of the Aeons to know or intelligize their source is channeled through the highest Aeon, the Son (Nous), who alone knows the greatness of the Father. In the system of the *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I 76,2-12), the creative act of the Logos emanated from the Son, namely to make the nature of the Father known beyond the world of Aeons, is regarded as good. In most Valentinian sources a single female Aeon (Sophia) violates this restriction in a presumptuous attempt to know the father directly or to imitate his creative power. The willful act of this spiritual being is conceived as the origin of ignorance, and leads to the rise of passions (repentance, grief, fear, perplexity, and puzzlement conceived as modes of ignorance) which become materialized as the ignorant demiurge (the psychic nature) and the four elements (the material nature) from which the visible world takes its rise. The three levels of the Valentinian cosmos, Ground (Bythos)-Pleroma-Kenoma (each separated from the other by a boundary called Horos), and the stage-by-stage development from unity to multiplicity reveal the nature of the Valentinian myth as a narrative of the vicissitudes of knowledge itself: thinking in potency (Bythos); thinking in actuality (the Aeons); thinking in its "falleness" (Sophia and the demiurge). Just as Sophia is separated from the product of her defective thinking and restored to the Pleroma, so also the fallen, estranged self-

knowledge of the individual Gnostic is returned to its origin by his or her own act of knowing the myth. Much like Jonas, Krämer schematizes this movement:

> At the beginning stands the unfolding of thinking out of the primal source, which by self-reflection brings itself forth and expresses itself in the thinking of the Pleroma, the original multiplicity. There follows the self-alienation of thinking into pathos, and finally its self-expression in hylic corporeality. A final phase of the movement of the divine thought is completed in the return of thinking to its highest form.[60]

This structure and movement is a mythological form of the Platonic-Academic "στοιχεῖον Metaphysik" (metaphysics of elemental principles) and is inexplicable on the basis of purely gnostic (dualistic) premises alone. It shows that alongside the static three-level Middleplatonic metaphysics there existed a four-level metaphysics (the highest principle is beyond thinking), which led to the metaphysics of Plotinus. This four-level metaphysics is not a purely gnostic invention, since it has its roots in Plato's oral teaching and in Speusippus. Later on it appears in Moderatus and Philo of Alexandria, Platonists whose systems were strongly influenced by Neopythagorean speculation, and in Origen, who is probably dependent on gnostic-Valentinian traditions. Although it was an adaptation of a prior Platonic metaphysical system that was shared by Gnostics and many others, Krämer concludes that Plotinus' metaphysics is not gnostic, since the gnostic god is a primal "subject," while Plotinus' god is prior to subject and object.

In 1975 there appeared the important monograph of Christoph Elsas on Gnostic and Neoplatonic world rejection in the school of Plotinus,[61] which seeks to build on the previous work of Carl Schmidt[62] in determining the doctrine and identity of the Gnostics opposed by Plotinus in his *Großschrift* that originally comprised *Enneads* III, 8; V, 8; V, 5 and II, 9 (chronologically, tractates, 30-33).[63] On the basis of a lengthy

60. *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 259.

61. C. ELSAS, *Neuplatonische und gnostische Weltablehnung in der Schule Plotins*, (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 34; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1975).

62. *Plotins' Stellung zum Gnosticismus und Kirchlichen Christentums* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 20; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1901).

63. Originally recognized as a complete, integral composition by R. HARDER, "Ein neue Schrift Plotins," *Hermes* 71 (1936), 1-10.

analysis, Elsas isolates some 140 citations from this composition—originally constituting, according to R. Harder, a four-hour oral refutation—representing the claims of Plotinus' gnostic opponents which Plotinus quoted or paraphrased and refuted in the course of these tractates.[64] These 140 citations are then rearranged by Elsas into a systematic presentation of the doctrine of Plotinus' gnostic opponents[65] beginning with a description of the human existential situation they presuppose ("Gegenwärtiges Sein"), and then developing the metaphysics on the basis of which these Gnostics depicted the pre-temporal nature of the universe ("Vorzeitiges Sein"), the subsequent fall into the realm of becoming upon the creation of this world and man's predicament in it ("Vorzeitiges Werden"), and finally the future deliverance from it ("Zukünftiges Werden") and the return to pre-temporal bliss ("Zukünftiges Sein"). These phases of the gnostic account of origins, fall and restoration are each treated on the basis of underlying dualities (e.g. divine and worldly, spiritual and corporeal, election and falleness, spirit and matter, light and darkness, good and evil, being and becoming, unity and division, etc.; the resemblance to Jonas' categories and systematic presentation is intentional). Elsas supplements his systematic presentation of the doctrine of Plotinus' gnostic opponents elicited from Plotinus' refutation point-for-point with comparative material drawn from the teachings of various philosophers and gnostic documents; in particular from the doctrines of the *viri novi* of Arnobius' *Adversus nationes* (especially where these stand in tension with Porphyry), the Hermetica (especially *Poimandres*), Zosimus' *On the Letter Omega*, the Neoplatonists Amelius and Porphyry (before and after his association with Plotinus), the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the Middleplatonist/Neopythagorean Numenius, the Neopythagorean/gnostic (i.e., Valentinian/Ophite) inscriptions and frescoes of the Aurelean tombs near the Viale Manzoni, the heresiological reports on the Sethians, Naasenes, Barbelo-Gnostics, Ophites and Valentinians, the Bruce Codex, and such of the Nag Hammadi tractates as were available to Elsas.

64. "Die Entfaltung des plotinischen Denkens in der Pokmik der Schriften 30-33", *Neuplatonische und gnostische Weltablehnung*, 56-85.

65. "Systematisches Zuordnung der Zeugnisse über die Gegner Plotins," *ibid.*, 86-237.

In Elsas' opinion, the Gnostics who appeared in Plotinus' circle are to be identified with the *viri novi* refuted by Arnobius.[66] This group of "reborn" Christian Gnostics is held to be responsible for the integration of the Middleplatonist/Neopythagorean metaphysics of Numenius and the *Chaldaean Oracles* with certain inherited gnostic traditions by means of a typically gnostic hermeneutic. In tractates 30-33 Plotinus criticizes principally the philosophical teachers on the basis of whose thought these Gnostics constructed their cosmological, ontological and mystical doctrine. The *viri novi* are called by Arnobius "followers of Mercury" (i.e. Hermetics); the term *viri novi* may suggest "renewed" or "reborn" and perhaps a connection with the Sethian "Allogeneis" mentioned by Porphyry (*Vita Plotini*, 16) and others; they are said to depend on Numenius and Cronius; their cosmology bears structural resemblance to that of the *Chaldaean Oracles*; and they sustain various connections with the Hellenistic Magi-traditions in general (such as reflected in Zosimus).[67] Although Porphyry suggests that the Gnostics around Plotinus are Christian, this Gnosticism is actually of a more pagan sort, basically Greek in origin.[68]

The common metaphysical background of Plotinus' Gnostics, the *viri novi* and various other gnostic groups (Peratae, Docetae, etc.) is the philosophy of Numenius. The group most closely related to Gnosticism having the closest connection to Numenius is said to be the (only incipiently gnostic) Jewish Christian Elchasaites with their astrological teachings, interest in Jewish traditions, purification doctrines, asceticism, and presumed Pythagoreanism.[69] Such teachings are all present in the syncretistic Jewish-Persian culture of Numenius' homeland Syria, where also the *Chaldaean Oracles* may have been composed. Numenius de-

66. *Ibid.*, 42, 248, etc.

67. ELSAS often posits daring identifications (the *viri novi* are Plotinus' opponents; the gnostic prophet Nicotheos is none other than Elchasai), takes clear sides on disputed issues (the Middleplatonist Origen is to be distinguished from the Church Father Origen; the Chaldean Oracles depend on Numenius, not the reverse), and posits fascinating historical connections (e.g. in early 3rd century Rome, the Elchasaites bound traditions concerning their prophetic figures Marthana, Marsanes, Marsianos Marthus, Martiades [all derived from Syriac *mrd*, "rebel"] and Nicotheos with the current Sethian-Archontic Gnosticism, influencing not only Mani, but also, at an earlier time, acquainting Numenius with gnosticizing Jewish traditions).

68. ELSAS, *op. cit.*, 243.

69. In fact Elsas identifies Elchasai with the Nicotheos mentioned by Zosimus, Porphyry, and the last tractate of the Bruce Codex.

veloped his metaphysics in dependence upon Alexandrian metaphysical speculation, perhaps Philo's in particular; this was also the base upon which the *Chaldaean Oracles* built their metaphysics, mediating them to gnostic groups in Rome near the time of Plotinus. Hence Numenius, though not himself a Gnostic, occupies a central role in the development of Gnosticism.

With early access to the entire Nag Hammadi Library, especially the tractates the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Marsanes*, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, Elsas might have stressed the connection of Plotinus' Gnostics with Irenaeus' "Barbeloites" or Sethians rather than with the *viri novi* of Arnobius, about whom we know little enough already in comparison to the Sethians, who have left us extensive literature. According to Porphyry, the only demonstrably identifiable gnostic documents read in Plotinus' circle are Sethian: "apocalypses of Zoroaster and Zostrianos and Nicotheos and Allogenes and Messos and of other such figures" (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 16) whose stance was attacked by Plotinus and whose doctrines were refuted at great length by Amelius and Porphyry himself in the period 244-269 CE. This does not mean that those proffering these treatises were Sethians or Barbeloites; only that they used Sethian traditions. It is not impossible that the opponents were Arnobius' *viri novi*, yet Elsas bases this claim mainly upon the assumption that Latin *viri novi* may render the Greek ἀλλογενεῖς[70] and upon the tenuous connection between the (probably Barbeloite or Sethian) figures of Nicotheos and Marsanes with Elchasaite teachers whose names later became the property of Sethian-Archontic Gnosticism.[71] On the contrary, much more evidence supports the connection of the *viri novi* with Hermetic tradition.[72] Perhaps the greatest weakness in the identification of the *viri novi* with Plotinus' Gnostics is that in Arnobius' report the former betray no acquaintance with the gnostic Sophia myth criticized by Plotinus at such length (*Ennead* II, 9.10,19-12,44), while the version closest to that presupposed by Plotinus is to be found in the Sethian-Barbeloite tractate *Zostrianos* (VIII 9,16-13,6; cf. also the parallelism of terms: Paroikesis, Antitypoi, Metanoia throughout *Zostrianos* with *Ennead* II, 9.6,2 and "reflection of a reflection" with "image of an image" in *Ennead* II, 9.10,24-29).

70. ELSAS, *op. cit.*, 41; in fact, the term "Allogenes" probably derives from Seth's conception as "another seed" (σπέρμα ἕτερον) in the place of Cain, Gen 4:25.

71. *Ibid.*, 39.

72. *Ibid.*, 41-44.

Furthermore, while the metaphysics of Numenius may have influenced both those of Plotinus and his gnostic opponents, distinctive features of the metaphysics of the Sethian treatises read in Plotinus' circle do not invite his detailed refutation. They bear about as much resemblance to Numenius' metaphysics as to Plotinus' own, each displaying a considerable elaboration beyond Numenius. The doctrines criticized by Plotinus may not then, after all, provide evidence sufficient to identify his opponents with any precision. If anything, Sethian metaphysical doctrine is closer to that of the *Chaldaean Oracles* than to that of Numenius, to judge from the elaborate tripartitioning of the intellectual principle (i.e. the triadic structure of the Aeon of Barbelo) shared by these sources. Although Elsas, lacking the Nag Hammadi source material critical to his thesis, was unable at the time to draw the closest and most exact historical connection between the Gnostics and Plotinus' opponents, his remains the most compendious and thoroughgoing treatment of the relation between Gnosticism and the Platonic tradition currently available.

In 1977, John Dillon provided a brief treatment of Valentinian Gnosticism in his magisterial *The Middle Platonists*, in which, under the heading "Some Loose Ends," he treats gnostic metaphysics as an eddy current in the "underworld of Platonism." He expresses there the hope that his necessarily selective survey will "serve to indicate that the influence of the Platonic world-view penetrated very widely into the seething mass of sects and salvation-cults that sprang up within the Graeco-Roman world in the first two centuries A.D.":[73]

> All the systems that I have selected, the Valentinians, the *Poemandres*, and the *Oracles*, derive all existence, down even to Matter, from one Supreme Principle. They recognize also a distinction between this Supreme Principle and a Demiurge, the latter directly responsible for the creation of the world—though in Gnosticism proper the status of this entity is one of very doubtful honour. There is also recognized a pervasive female principle, responsible for multiplicity, differentiation, and the generation (and ultimate salvation or return) of all lower existence. The female principle tends to be split into two or three entities, arising at different levels. We have seen

73. J. M. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B. C. to A. D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977; rev. edition with a new afterword, 1996), 396.

> such a figure manifesting itself in this way within Platonism as well. The theory of the nature of the soul, its descent into matter, its strategy of escape, and its destiny after death, is also close to that of Platonism. In addition, there are such pervasive images as that of Light against Darkness, the inexhaustible Fount of Being, and the wings of the Soul, which, if not derived from Platonism, are certainly shared in common with it. Platonism, therefore, in its 'Middle' development, stands out as at least one important influence in the formation of these systems.

Although, for want of space, Dillon has necessarily had to restrict his account of this common sharing between Gnosticism and Platonism to the Valentinian and Hermetic schools, he nevertheless leaves one with the impression that this sharing was only unidirectional, with the Gnostics as the receivers and the Platonists as the suppliers. We shall shortly see, however, that that is not the whole story.

In 1978, A. H. Armstrong contributed a major article on "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy" to the Jonas *Festschrift*.[74] While he considers philosophy to be a more or less public phenomenon in which the divine reveals itself in an essentially good and divinely ordained cosmos through our divinely-given reason, Gnosis is for him a fundamentally private and esoteric revelation which explains the evil of the cosmos, its anti-divine origin and the saving knowledge necessary to escape to another far-off world of light presided over by the true but alien supreme deity. In this sense, the cosmically optimistic revelations of the Hermetica differ from typical Greek philosophy only in their rather esoteric character. Much more problematical is the relationship between philosophy and those gnostic revelations that are based on the notion of a pre-cosmic fault and a fall of being from the world of light leading to the creation of a prison-like world made by a stupid and inferior creator. In the Platonic-Pythagorean view, the world is always an ordered place, ruled by good gods not responsible for the evil which it contains; the cause of that evil is as necessary to the existence of the whole as is the cause of good things. The principle opposed to the good is that of indefinite multiplicity, whose inability to submit completely to the formal and ordering power of the good principle appears in the sublunar material world as intractable, irrational, and disorderly, while in the realms above the moon there is no evil at all, since the principle of multiplicity

74. A. H. ARMSTRONG, "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 87-124.

there fully submits to the ordering cause. The Gnostic, on the other hand, is said to regard even the heavenly realm as ruled by evil. In the later Neoplatonists, this principle of multiplicity is no longer a principle of evil, but instead becomes on every level an expression of the divine infinity proceeding from the ultimate Good; rather than a positive principle of evil, there is only the relative absence of the Good. Throughout, the presence of divinely originated human souls on earth was felt to be an embarrassing problem for Pythagoreans and Platonists, whose explanations for their presence varied between the old Pythagorean-Orphic idea of a pre-natal sin and an attendant fall into the cycle of birth and death (as in Empedocles), and the idea that souls, with their divine nature, are sent down by higher divine powers to help them in their divine work here below (as claimed by Iamblichus and the commentaries of Proclus).[75]

Although Gnostics certainly adapted Greek philosophy, for Armstrong they manifest a distinct way of feeling and thinking about God, man and the world that has little in common with Greek philosophers. Their use of Greek philosophy is not genuine, as is that of participants in the philosophical tradition, but "extraneous and mostly superficial," except insofar as they shared with certain philosophers a tendency to attribute evil to an originally passive and negative principle of evil rather than to an intentional and proactive one. However, some second-century Greek philosophers, such as Plutarch in his *On Isis and Osiris* (368D-371B), seem to have been influenced by an Iranian conflict dualism in positing the presence of an active principle of evil (Seth-Typhon) in the heavens able to cause irrational events like eclipses. Plutarch sharply distinguishes this principle from the passive, feminine principle of Matter (Isis) who lovingly submits to the good demiurge Osiris, the supreme principle of form and order. A similar conflict dualism is also present in Atticus, who with Plutarch could base the theory of a pre-existent, independent and evil soul as the source of irrational disturbances on a popular exegesis of Plato's late speculations on the source of evil in *Laws* 896E-897D and the doctrine of the receptacle in *Timaeus* 52-53. A similar doctrine of an evil soul in matter is espoused by Numenius, who also believed humans possessed two souls, one good and

75. Iamblichus, *De anima, apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium*, I.49.39,44-53 [I.378-79 Wachmuth]; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.277,31-279,2 and *In Platonis Alcibiadem I commentaria* 32.9-34.10.

one evil. Perhaps one finds also in Numenius an instance of gnostic influence on a Platonic philosopher, in his notion of a demiurge who alternates between contemplation of the suprajacent divine mind and the unification of form and matter below, but, forgetting himself in his concern with matter, becomes split into a second and third God whose lower aspect falls towards the heavenly spheres. Armstrong suspects that Numenius' doctrines of the two souls in man, of the presence of evil in the heavens, and of a split, distracted demiurge forgetful of himself may owe something to a combination of heterodox Jewish dualistic ideas tinged with gnostic influence. Nevertheless, these second-century thinkers, for whom the value of the material world lies near the lower end of the scale of valuation, hold this cosmos to be beautiful; its creator cannot be the despicable, arrogant, inferior being found in certain gnostic myths.

We have seen that according to Jonas, these later Platonic systems, including that of Plotinus, are akin to and are to be understood in terms of contemporary gnostic systems. They are to be regarded as part of a general pattern of speculation preeminently expressed and developed in Gnosticism. Even though some of these Platonists, especially Plotinus, opposed Gnosticism, especially its elitism and its excessive devaluation of the created order, the structure of their thought betrays their true, even if unconscious commonality with gnostic thought. If, with Jonas, one understands the Neoplatonic system-building tendency to have originated in gnostic circles (especially of the Syrian-Egyptian branch), then, even taking into account differences of attitude, mood and expression, one can call later Platonism a form of gnostic thought. Armstrong dissociates himself from this view. He rejects the notion of a general spirit or characteristic of the thought of late antiquity which expresses itself equally in Gnosticism, Alexandrian patristic authors, and late antique philosophy.

Armstrong also recalls Jonas' characterization of the peculiar position of the Soul in Plotinus' thought: while the status of each level of being save that of the One is defined by its relation to the next higher level, the universal Soul stands out by being directed also to that which is lower than itself, and so, as its individuated expression, the human soul must choose to orient itself either to the lower or to the higher realms. This burden of choice with its potential for ambiguity, ambivalence, and sense of faultedness interrupts and causes a potentially tragic fissure in

an otherwise strictly deductive metaphysics. Armstrong counters this with the observation that, for Plotinus, the embodiment of the soul in human bodies is a good and necessary part of the self-diffusion of the Good throughout the universe to the last and lowest limits of possible existence; the Logos of man in the intelligible world must include both body and soul. Indeed, much to the consternation of later Neoplatonists, Plotinus held that the higher aspect of the individual soul remains permanently within the realm of Intellect, while only its formative principle (its Logos) enters into the human psycho-physical complex which can be said to behave with audacity (τόλμα), falling farther than necessary into the material world in self-centered forgetfulness. In the case of the cosmic Soul, not all of it, but only a "part" or "power" of it has an independent nature that wants to be "on its own" by thinking its mental objects in succession and not all at once (as in the case of the Intellect); it turns from noetic rest to successional discursive reasoning, thus "temporalizing" itself and enslaving the material world to time (*Ennead* II, 7.11,1-31). While Jonas considers this turn of events typical of gnostic mythical dramas of the tragic fall of the soul, Armstrong finds it merely to be a legitimate Platonic principle that soul-movement must precede body-movement, thus accounting for the temporality of this world which is the best possible image of the intelligible world. Plotinus was no Gnostic; as the conclusion of his second *Ennead* shows, he was in fact an opponent of Gnosticism, and, together with the anti-gnostic elements in orthodox Christianity, helped to ensure the ultimate defeat of the gnostic way of thinking and feeling about this world as a serious option for our culture.

Armstrong would therefore deny to Gnostics any genuine participation in the development and employment of Platonic philosophy, and perhaps also any genuine influence thereupon. But as we shall see, such a position becomes difficult to maintain in the case of certain gnostic treatises whose metaphysical doctrines evince not only a deep and penetrating, but also an innovative, involvement in the Platonic philosophical enterprise.

D. The Gnostic Synthesis of Judaic and Platonic Conceptuality

The contribution of Judaism to the formation of gnostic mythology has by now been well established by scholars like G. Quispel, G. W. Mac-

Rae, B. A. Pearson, A. F. Segal, J. E. Fossum and G. G. Stroumsa.[76] All emphasize the role of an inner-Jewish exegesis of problematic biblical passages, mainly those containing highly anthropomorphic depictions of God which might be taken to call into question God's ultimate goodness, transcendence and omnipotence. Such concerns led to the development of ideas concerning intermediating angelic powers active in the cosmos and even responsible for its creation. According to Stroumsa, the gnostic concern was not so much an attempt to preserve God's transcendence, but an obsession with the problem of evil and its source. Like various Jewish thinkers, they posited a hierarchical duality between God and a subordinate demiurgical angel, but the Gnostics radicalized this duality by demonizing the demiurge and actually identifying him with Satan.

Recently I. P. Culianu[77] sought to emphasize the foundational contribution of both Jewish and Platonic thinkers to gnostic thought by examining a limited set of exegetical or interpretive transformations they applied to the two foundational protological texts of the Graeco-Roman world, the book of Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus*, in an effort to reconcile

76. G. W. MACRAE, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970), 86-101; B. A. PEARSON, "Friedländer Revisited: Alexandrian Judaism and Gnostic Origins," *Studia Philonica* 2 (1973), 23-31; *IDEM*, "Jewish Haggadic Traditions in the Testimony of Truth from NH (IX.3)," in *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren oblata*, ed. J. Bergmann, K. Drynjeff, and H. Ringgren (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), vol. 1, 457-470; *IDEM*, "Biblical Exegesis in Gnostic Literature," in *Armenian and Biblical Studies*, ed. M. Stone (Jerusalem, 1976), 70-80; *IDEM*, "Gnostic Interpretation of the Old Testament in the Testimony of Truth," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (1980), 311-319; *IDEM*, "The Problem of 'Jewish Gnostic' Literature," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and the New Testament*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 15-36; A. F. SEGAL, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Studies in Judaism in late antiquity 25; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977); J. E. FOSSUM, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 36; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1985); *IDEM*, "Gen 1,26 and 2,7 in Judaism, Samaritanism, and Gnosticism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 16 (1985), 202-239; *IDEM*, "The Origin of the Gnostic Concept of the Demiurge," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 61 (1985), 145-152; and G. A. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Nag Hammadi Studies 24; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984).

77. I. P. CULIANU, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism*, (Engl. trans. H. S. Weiser, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 123-125.

fundamental incongruities in their respective accounts; the resultant interpretive strategies gave rise to the major gnostic myths. Borrowing H. Bloom's[78] characterization of gnostic exegesis as a form of "misprision" ("mis-taking" or "creative misunderstanding"), he observes: "Indeed, Gnosticism is Platonic hermeneutics so suspicious of tradition that it is willing to break through the borders of tradition, any tradition, including its own. Conversely, regarded through the eyes of tradition, any tradition, it appears as 'misprision'." Again: "Gnostic exegesis of Genesis admits a definition strikingly similar to Philonic exegesis: It is an interpretation of a Jewish text according to a set of rules derived from Platonism."

Thus, whereas Philo of Alexandria identified the Biblical creator God with the supreme Monad presiding over the transcendent world of ideas, the Gnostics identified that God with the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*, who consults a divine paradigm beyond him as the model for his creation. The result of this is the supposition that there must be a God presiding over the ideal realm who is superior to the God of Genesis. In addition, the biblical stress on the sole godhead of the creator, who continually asserts his sole supremacy, would cause Platonist exegetes to raise serious questions about a god who boasts in his supremacy (e.g., "I am a jealous God" in Dt 5:9 and "I am God and there is none other beside me" in Is 45:5-7, 18, 21; 46:9), but is known not to be supreme. The implication is that this demiurge is a faulty being, vainly boastful and ignorant of the God beyond him. As the link between this supreme God and the demoted creator, the Gnostics posit an intermediate Sophia/Logos figure, who may exist in several manifestations ranging from the supreme Mother, God's consort or First Thought, to the actual mother of the demiurge. While Platonists could well identify the creator of Genesis with the creative Logos, the Gnostics, attending to the contradiction between a Sophia/Logos who is aware of being subordinated to a higher deity and a demiurge who brags about being unique, would conclude that the Sophia/Logos must be a third entity.

These three beings, God, Sophia/Logos and Demiurge, would be connected in such a way as to maintain God's inculpability for the faults of this world and allow for the demiurge's ignorance of what is beyond him. Culpability must be assigned to the demiurge, yet the demiurge

78. H. BLOOM, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1983), esp. 62.

must also maintain an essential relation to the Platonic creative instrumentality of Sophia/Logos: thus the demiurge is indeed produced from the Sophia/Logos figure, but this production turns out to be an unwanted mistake. In turn, Sophia/Logos becomes an ambiguous figure, both giving rise to the creator of a world which was not intended to be as it is, and, at the same time, being the source of the divine substance that takes up enforced residence in that world. This tragedy is said to be due to a misdirected eroticism or curiosity or inexperience or a downward direction of attention. Both this ambiguity in the Sophia/Logos figure and the ignorance of the demiurge seem to be the fundamental point of the Gnostics' departure from the general Platonist view of the cosmos as the necessary expression of the fullness of the world of ideas implemented without jealousy by a demiurge who is cognizant of the transcendent realm beyond him. Yet this same Sophia/Logos—in various guises—is able to rectify much of its mistaken creative activity by acting also as the instrument that appears in the world—again in various guises—for the salvation of the divine element that was taken from her and enclosed in the lower world by her demiurgical offspring.

It thus appears that Platonism, defined especially by the *Timaeus*, constitutes the basic framework for gnostic solutions to the exegetical enigmas of the Genesis text. While the Valentinian creator is expressly equated with Plato's demiurge, Sethian texts do not actually call their world creator, Yaldabaoth, "demiurge," a phenomenon apparently unnoticed by Culianu.[79] Moreover, whereas the demiurge of the *Timaeus* is confronted with unformed, chaotic matter and reduces it to order in accord with an eternal paradigm, the Sethian Archon, himself amorphous and chaotic, is no true demiurge. As the aborted son of Sophia, his character is essentially devoid of form and order. Even though he copies an image of the eternal aeonic paradigm, he cannot directly see it; he knows nothing of the world beyond him, and thus produces a chaotic copy with more similarity to his own being than to the image he copies. And his ability to copy what he does is due not to his ungrudging intelligence, but to the power he stole from his mother Sophia, by which an unintended element of perfection has nevertheless come to dwell in his creation (an element that, once incorporated into Adam, will prove to be

79. On this, see E. THOMASSEN, "The Platonic and the Gnostic 'Demiurge,'" in *Apocryphon Severini, presented to Søren Giversen*, ed. P Bilde *et al.* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1993), 226-243.

Yaldabaoth's own undoing). To be sure, the overall scheme resembles that of the *Timaeus*, yet it is more a parody of it than a direct implementation. This may constitute yet another gnostic "creative misprision," in this case, of the very Platonic exegetical framework borrowed from the *Timaeus* and applied to the solutions of the biblical protological enigmas. In gnostic thought, perhaps there is an analogy between the gnostic use of the two protological texts: just as the Jewish creator God is subordinated to an even higher supreme deity, so also the demiurge of the *Timaeus* is interpreted in terms of his lower subordinates, the "younger gods" to whom the demiurge assigns the task of combining the rational soul substance created by him with the lower spirited and appetitive parts of the soul, and incarnating this mixture into the mortal bodies of humans. In this way, the figure that in each tradition is responsible for the creation of humans is demoted from its place in the original narrative as a way of explaining the origin of a human condition perceived as defective.

It also seems that the structuring of the transcendent world in many gnostic texts is based on a creative reading of the text of Genesis in the light of the Platonic doctrine of models and copies. In the gnostic view, as in that of a Hellenistic Jew like Philo of Alexandria, the protology of Genesis occurs on two planes, the heavenly (the creation according to Gen 1:1-2:3) and earthly (the creation according to Gen 2:4 ff.). The first creation story tells of the creation of an intelligible world whose contents form the prototypes for the creation of its perceptible counterpart in the second account. For the Gnostics, there are two creative divinities, the supreme deity who spontaneously gives rise to the divine heavenly world, and his lowly counterpart, the Archon who aggressively creates the psychic and material world as a copy of the heavenly one. Likewise, in gnostic sources, one can find two Sophia/Logos figures, the Mother on high, the First Thought and instrument of the supreme deity active in the world as the Logos (as in the Sethian *Trimorphic Protennoia*), and the lower mother, usually called Sophia, who mistakenly gives birth to the lower creator, the Archon.[80]

80. In the Sethian interpretation of Gen 2:4 ff., one can postulate two son figures, the heavenly Adam of Genesis 1 (called Adamas or Pigeradamas or Autogenes) and his earthly copy, the Adam of the garden, shaped by the Archon. One can further discern two more mother figures, a heavenly Eve, called Zoe or the Epinoia of light, and the earthly Eve produced from Adam's side by the Archon, as well as two more

E. Rethinking the Relationship between Gnosticism and Platonism: A Caveat

The evidence for the role of Platonism in the shaping of so many instances of gnostic myth is indeed impressive, if not overwhelming. There are, however, serious debates about how one should evaluate the precise relationship between Platonism in general and Valentinian, "Sethian," or other such mythological systems. These debates generally turn on such issues as whether Platonic philosophy itself could be imagined as the ultimate source of such mythologies, or the extent to which these mythologies are fundamentally different in mood, method, and presupposition from "true philosophy." The preceding survey demonstrates the extreme reticence of most historians of Platonic philosophy as well as its ancient practitioners to admit the composers and users of such gnostic texts into the camp of genuine Platonists. The most often-cited reasons for this exclusion are based on the way many gnostic texts maintain a more or less sharp distinction between the supreme deity and the creator of the physical world, a form of dualism that suggests a negative or "anticosmic" stance toward the created order. While a few texts trace such a dualistic antagonism back to the very roots of being, others portray one or more demiurgical figures that are portrayed as evil from the beginning of their activity, others feature evil or inferior demiurges who declined or devolved from an original monistic perfection, and yet others entertain originally good demiurgical figures who later revolted. It is of course not only this feature that tends to exclude these texts from the corpus of Platonic literature; indeed, one often suspects that an even more basic reason is the rather floridly depicted, densely-populated divine world portrayed in them, which seems to constitute a kind of

sons, a heavenly Seth ("the great Seth"), whose earthly image was born as the son of the earthly Adam and Eve once they had been enlightened by the Mother on high. In fact, Gen 1:26 ("let us create Adam in our image, according to our likeness") could be construed to mean that: 1) on the transcendent plane, the high deity must be the absolute Human ("Man"); his offspring, the heavenly Adamas, would be the Son of Man, and Adamas' son Seth would be "the son of the Son of Man" (as in *Eugnostos the Blessed*) or the like; and 2) on the earthly plane the plural "we" refers to the archontic fashioners of Adam's' body. Finally, the Platonic tradition may been a likely source for the "Father, Mother and Child" nomenclature applied to the Sethian heavenly trinity, for in *Timaeus* 50D Plato explicitly compares his three ultimate ontological principles, the forms, the receptacle or nurse of becoming, and the images of the forms constituting the phenomenal world to such a "family triad."

"unnecessary multiplication of hypostases." Because most of the texts from Nag Hammadi and related sources are Christian or contain some Christian elements, the polytheistic-sounding mythology that is so often encountered in them is likely to seem more bizarre and "out of place" to the modern reader, more "deviant" than it would have seemed to most persons from the world of Graeco-Roman antiquity, where some form of polytheism was taken for granted. But rather than concluding that these texts are untrue to genuine Platonism or are simply "anti-Platonic," one might just as well conclude that they rather express a true dedication to Platonism, and an attempt to further its influence on the culture at large. In other words, as Michael Williams has recently pointed out,[81] "the mythologizing in such texts probably constituted for many a part of an overall attempt to alleviate cultural distance or tension between traditions and widely accepted patterns of symbolism and thought that were dominantly authoritative in their world," for example, to bring Platonic philosophy more into line with Jewish or Christian tradition, or vice-versa. That is, they were attempting, often in very different ways, to reduce the distance between on the one hand elements of the inherited Jewish and/or Jesus-movement traditions, and on the other hand key presuppositions from the wider culture, including Platonic philosophy.

Throughout the preceding—and many other—treatments of the relationship between Platonism and Gnosticism, one notes the appearance of various clichés that have come to be almost routinely invoked at any mention of "gnosticism," such as "proletarian Platonism," "the underworld of Platonism," "inverse-" or "protest-exegesis," "anticomism," "antisomatism," and so on. But as Williams[82] points out, such terms

> ... are at best misleading caricatures and at worst completely unjustified as characterizations of the actual texts normally placed in the "gnostic" category. Such clichés have with time and repetition established themselves as deeply rooted generalizations about features to be expected in all "gnostic" sources, even though many of these supposedly characteristic features of "gnosticism" are, as we will see, not really so characteristic. Thus we are told that the main principle of gnostic hermeneutics is "inverse exegesis," the constant and systematic reversal of accepted interpretations of Scripture. Conditioned by this caricature, we are not looking to account for what, in the sources themselves, is in fact not at all a constant and system-

81. M. A. WILLIAMS, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 107.
82. *Ibid.*, 52-53.

> atic reversal of accepted interpretations but an assortment of far more subtle hermeneutic programs. Or we are told that gnostics were "anticosmic" pessimists and completely isolated from the society they opposed. Set up with this expectation, we are unprepared to make any meaning out of the significant amount of evidence in these sources of persons who in reality often display a distinct optimism about their mission within society. Our battery of clichés tells us to expect that gnostics "hated their bodies," and we are therefore unprepared to assimilate the much subtler range of attitudes toward the body actually encountered in these sources. Or our labor-saving construct alerts us that gnostics will have little or no interest in virtue and the ethical improvement of the individual, and thus we are not ready to find texts that do reflect concern about avoiding sin and about making moral progress. We are set up to expect that gnostics will believe that an individual's nature and destiny are fixed at birth with salvation or destruction predetermined, and therefore we are not looking for those signals of provisionality that are actually present in text after text.

It will not be the purpose of this book to enlarge upon these important points, with which I am in strong agreement, but I set them forth here as caveats to be borne constantly in mind, especially when considering the extent to which gnostic authors were genuine partners in the Platonic philosophical enterprise, and may have indeed made important contributions thereto. My purpose is rather to examine the relationships and possible mutual influences between Platonism—especially Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism—and Gnosticism—especially of the "Sethian" variety—in greater detail and to identify instances of demonstrable connections between certain gnostic texts and well-known Platonic sources.

F. Platonizing Treatises in the Nag Hammadi Library

Before proceeding to the main topic of study, a few words are in order concerning the main source of the texts under consideration, namely the Coptic Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi.[83] This library of thirteen

83. The basic bibliographical source for research on the Nag Hammadi Codices is D. M. SCHOLER, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1948-1969* (Nag Hammadi Studies 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971) and *IDEM*, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography 1970-1994* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 1; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); supplements published annually in *Novum Testamentum*. The Nag Hammadi Studies series of E. J. Brill contains the edited Coptic text, English translation, introduction and critical notes to all the Nag Hammadi Codices. The photographic facsimiles of the Codices are contained in *The Facsimile Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, 11 vols., Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973-1984, sponsored by the Arab Republic of Egypt and UNESCO.

papyrus codices written in Coptic was unearthed beneath the cliff of the Gebel et Tarif (overlooking the Nile near Nag Hammadi, Egypt) by one Muhammad Ali Es-Saman in December 1945.[84] Its original 1253 written pages (about 1153 survive) contained 53 original gnostic treatises (apocalypses, gospels, letters, sayings collections, systematic expositions of gnostic myths) of which 41 were previously unknown. While all the treatises contain concepts and motifs familiar also from later Platonism, certain treatises show themselves to be heavily influenced by late Platonic philosophy and some even to preoccupy themselves with it intentionally.

The first of the Nag Hammadi treatises interpreted in the light of later Platonism was the *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5) in J. Zandee's monograph, *The Terminology of Plotinus and of Some Gnostic Writings, Mainly the Fourth Treatise of the Jung Codex* (Istanbul, 1961). This treatise is certainly Valentinian, probably belonging to the "western" branch of Valentinianism, and possibly the work of Heracleon, portions of whose Valentinian commentary on the Gospel of John are preserved by Origen.[85] Krämer's argument for the Platonic and Neopythagorean influence on Valentinianism has been described above. Zandee shows that the terminology and structure of thought found in the *Tripartite Tractate* (as well as in the *Apocryphon of John* and certain Hermetica) conform closely with that of Plotinus, particularly in his earlier writings which show very little hostility to Gnosticism. According to Zandee, these points of agreement are to be explained by common dependence on Middleplatonism, especially as represented by Numenius of Apamea, whom H.-Ch. Puech and E. R. Dodds agree to be rather gnostic.[86] These

84. See J. M. ROBINSON, "The Discovery of the Nag Hammadi Codices," *The Biblical Archeologist* 42 (1979), 206-224; *IDEM*, From Cliff to Cairo," in *Colloque international sur les textes de Nag Hammadi. (Québec, 22-25 août 1978)*, ed. B. Barc (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Études » 1; Québec and Louvain: Éditions Peeters and Université Laval, 1981), 21-58, and most recently, *IDEM*, "Nag Hammadi: The First Fifty Years," in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 44. Leiden, New York, and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1997), 3-34.

85. See H.-Ch. PUECH and G. QUISPEL, "Le quatrième écrit du Codex Jung," *Vigiliae Christianae* 9 (1955), 65-102.

86. H.-Ch. PUECH in E. R. Dodds, "Numenius and Ammonius" in *Les sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique V; Vandoeuvres-Genéve: Fondation

observations are confirmed by the much more recent commentaries by E. Thomassen and H. Attridge.[87]

In addition to other treatises, Codex VI (*6* and *8*) includes three Hermetic texts, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, a partial Coptic version of the Latin apocalypse of *Asclepius*, and a Hermetic prayer previously known from the Papyrus Mimaut.[88] Since the monumental work of A.-J. Festugière,[89] the Platonic ambiance of the Hermetica needs little further comment, and these Nag Hammadi Hermetica offer no exception. Another point of obvious Platonic influence in the Nag Hammadi treatises is the preceding treatise in Codex VI, *5*, which consists of a passage from Plato's *Republic* IX (588B-589B, on injustice) in a rather garbled Coptic translation.[90]

Besides the Hermetic treatises and the Valentinian treatises in Codices I, II, and XI (I,*2* [*The Gospel of Truth*], I,*3* [*The Treatise on the Resurrection*], I,*4* [*The Tripartite Tractate*]; II,*3* [*The Gospel of Phillip*]; XI,*1* [*The Interpretation of Knowledge*]; XI,*2* [*A Valentinian Exposition*]), there remains a large block of treatises that are heavily influenced by Platonism. These tractates are related to the so-called "Barbeloite" gnostic system described by Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I.29), now known under the rubric "Sethian Gnosticism," and they will form the principal subject of the following chapters.

Hardt, 1960), "Discussion," 38; DODDS in H.-Ch. Puech, "Plotin et les gnostiques": "Discussion," in *Les sources de Plotin*, 185.

87. E. THOMASSEN and L. PAINCHAUD, *Le Traité Tripartite* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes », 19), Québec and Louvain: Éditions Peeters and Université Laval, 1989; H. ATTRIDGE and E. PAGELS, in *Nag Hammadi Codex I (The Jung Codex): Introductions, Texts Translations, Indices*, ed. H. Attridge (Nag Hammadi Studies 23 & 24), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985.

88. Critical editions in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,1 and 4*, ed. D. M. PARROTT (Nag Hammadi Studies 11), Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979 and in J.-P. MAHÉ, *Hermès en Haute-Égypte*. Vol. I (1978). *Les textes hermétiques de Nag Hammadi et leurs parallèles grecs et latins*. Vol. II (1982). *Le Fragment du* Discours parfait *et les* Définitions hermétiques *arméniennes* (NH VI, 8.8a) (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 3 and 7, Québec and Louvain-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 1978, 1982).

89. *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*. I. *L'astrologie et les sciences occultes* (1949); II. *Le Dieu cosmique* (1949); III. *Les doctrines de l'âme* (1953); IV. *Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose* (1954), (Études bibliques. Paris: J. Gabalda/Librairie Lecoffre, 1949-1954).

90. Edited in PARROTT, *op. cit.*, n. 88 above.

PART ONE
SETHIAN GNOSTICISM

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITERATURE OF GNOSTIC SETHIANISM

I. THE SETHIANS

Since the relationship of Sethian Gnosticism to Platonism will be the primary focus of this book, and since Sethian Gnosticism is the less familiar of these two movements, it will be necessary to begin with a survey of the Gnostic literature on the basis of which Sethian Gnosticism has been delineated.

The more than fifty original treatises contain no less than eleven treatises that fit the designation "Sethian Gnostic." They reveal the existence of a hitherto unknown religious competitor of early Christianity that had its own roots in second temple Judaism. Sethian Gnosticism is now the earliest form of Gnosticism for which we possess a great deal of textual evidence. It appears to antedate and form a partial source for another equally well-documented form of Gnosticism, the Christian school of Valentinus (120-160 CE) and his followers. It had its roots in a form of Jewish speculation on the figure and function of Sophia, figure of the divine Wisdom featured in the Hebrew Bible. In the hands of Sethian Gnostics, the biblical functions of Sophia as creator, nourisher, and enlightener of the world were distributed among a hierarchy of feminine principles: an exalted divine Mother called Barbelo, the First Thought ("Protennoia," "Pronoia") of the supreme deity (the "Invisible Spirit") who is ultimate savior and enlightener, a lower Sophia responsible for both the creation of the physical world and the incarnation of portions of the supreme Mother's divine essence into human bodies, and the figure of the spiritual Eve ("Epinoia") who appears on the earthly plane to alert humankind ("Adam") to its true filiation with the divine First Thought. Salvation was achieved by the Mother's reintegration of her own dissipated essence into its original unity.

It must be stated at the start, however, that we have no record of any group, Gnostic or otherwise, who called themselves "Sethians," even though this convenient designation was used by the Church Fathers who

opposed this form of Gnosticism.[1] Instead, one finds that the composers and readers of this literature referred to themselves as "those who are worthy" (*passim*), "the great generation," "strangers" (in the *Apocalypse of Adam*), "the immovable, incorruptible race" (in *The Gospel of the Egyptians*), "the seed of Seth" (in *The Apocryphon of John*), "the living and unshakable race" (in *The Three Steles of Seth*), "the children of Seth" (in *Melchizedek*), or "the holy seed of Seth" (in *Zostrianos*). The terms "generation," "race", "seed" and "strangers" are all plays on the tradition of Seth's status as Adam's true image and as "another seed" (σπέρμα ἕτερον) in Gen 4:25 & 5:3:[2]

> And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said: "God has appointed for me another seed instead of Abel, for Cain slew him" (Gen 4:25 RSV).

וַיֵּדַע אָדָם עוֹד אֶת־אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת כִּי שָׁת־לִי אֱלֹהִים זֶרַע אַחֵר תַּחַת הֶבֶל כִּי הָרָגוֹ קָיִן׃

Ἔγνω δὲ Αδαμ Ευαν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ. καὶ συλλαβοῦσα ἔτεκεν υἱὸν καὶ ἐπωνόμασεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Σηθ λέγουσα Ἐξανέστησεν γάρ μοι ὁ θεὸς σπέρμα ἕτερον ἀντὶ Αβελ, ὃν, ἀπέκτεινεν Καιν.

> When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth (Gen 5:3 RSV).

וַיְחִי אָדָם שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמְאַת שָׁנָה וַיּוֹלֶד בִּדְמוּתוֹ כְּצַלְמוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ שֵׁת׃

1. E.g. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I.30), <Hippolytus> (in Pseudo-Tertullian, *Adversus omnes haereses* 8) and Epiphanius (*Panarion* 39).

2. See A. F. J. KLIJN, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 46, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), *passim*; M. E. STONE, "Report on Seth Traditions in the Armenian Adam Books," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, March 28-31, 1978*. Vol. II: *Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton (Supplements to *Numen* 41; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981) (hereafter cited as *Rediscovery* 2), 459-471; B. A. PEARSON, "The Figure of Seth in Gnostic Literature," in *Rediscovery* 2.472-504; G. A. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Nag Hammadi Studies 24, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984), 49-53, 73-80 (hereafter cited as *Another Seed*).

Ἔζησεν δὲ Αδαμ διακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη καὶ ἐγέννησεν κατὰ τὴν ἰδέαν αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπωνόμασεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Σηθ.

Seth's status as bearer and transmitter (unlike Cain and Abel) of the authentic image of Adam, the original recipient of the image of God, was of great significance to original composers and users of this literature, whether or not they called themselves Sethians or "the seed of Seth." The patristic opponents of these people gave them other designations, such as "Gnostics," "Barbeloites," "Sethians," "Ophites," "Archontics," and others besides. The multiplicity of names that they applied to a group or several groups of their opponents suggests that these church fathers were unaware of their precise identity. It may be that they merely derived these designations—as the modern reader might do—from the contents of their writings; thus, if Barbelo is mentioned as a prominent figure in their literature, the group behind this literature could be called "Barbeloites." Or, since the heresiologists objected to the doctrine of these writings, they perhaps even caricatured their opponents by applying to them versions of the many divine names found in their texts, as if to make them appear incredibly confused, sectarian, and hopelessly disunited—and thus heterodox and false—in contrast to the united and orthodox "Great Church."[3]

In spite of doubts about the historical appropriateness of the name "Sethian," we now proceed to survey a distinctive body of literature which contemporary scholarship identifies as "Sethian Gnostic" or "Gnostic Sethian," and to assess the relationship of these literary documents to one another as a means of outlining the doctrine and history of this brand of Gnosticism.

3. See F. WISSE, "The Nag Hammadi Library and the Heresiologists," *Vigiliae Christianae* 25 (1971), 205-223; *IDEM*, "The Sethians and the Nag Hammadi Library," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1972 Seminar Papers* (ed. L. C. McGaughy; Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1972), 601-607; *IDEM*, "Stalking those Elusive Sethians," in *Rediscovery* 2.563-576.

II. The Sethian Literature

Mainly following the lead of Hans-Martin Schenke of the Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptische-gnostische Schriften,[4] current scholarship considers the following texts to be representative of Sethian Gnosticism:[5]

4. H.-M. Schenke, "Das sethianische System nach Nag-hammadi-Handschriften," *Studia Coptica* (ed. P. Nagel; Berliner Byzantinische Arbeiten 45; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1974), 165-173, and *idem*, "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism," in *Rediscovery* 2.588-616, hereafter cited as "Gnostic Sethianism."

5. I generally follow the English translations in W. Foerster, ed., *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts*. Vol. I, Patristic Evidence (English transl. ed. R. McL. Wilson; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), and in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson and M. W. Meyer (Leiden and San Francisco: E. J. Brill and Harper & Row, 1988). For critical editions, see the respective volumes of The Coptic Gnostic Library: Edited with English Translation, Introduction and Notes, Published under the auspices of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, general editor J. M. Robinson: *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 2 and IV,2: The Gospel of the Egyptians*, ed. and trans. A. Böhlig and F. Wisse (Nag Hammadi Studies 4; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975); *The Apocalypse of Adam*, trans. G. W. MacRae, in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-5 and VI* ed. D. M. Parrott (Nag Hammadi Studies 11; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979); *The Books of Jeu and the Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex*, ed. C. Schmidt, trans. V. MacDermot (Nag Hammadi Studies 13; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978); "Melchizedek," trans. B. A. Pearson and S. Giverson and "The Thought of Norea," trans. B. A. Pearson and S. Giverson and "Marsanes," trans. B. A. Pearson in *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, ed. B. A. Pearson and S. Giversen (Nag Hammadi Studies 15; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981); *Allogenes*, trans. J. D. Turner and O. Wintermute and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, trans. J. D. Turner in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII and XIII*, ed. C. W. Hedrick (Nag Hammadi Studies 28; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990); *Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2*, ed. M. Waldstein and F. Wisse (Leiden, New York, and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995); *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, trans. B. Layton in *Nag Hammadi Codex II.2-7, together with XIII,2*, Brit. Lib. Or. 4926(1) and P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655*. Vol. 2: *On the Origin of the World, Exegesis on the Soul, Book of Thomas, Indexes*, ed. B. Layton (Nag Hammadi Studies 21; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989); the *Three Steles of Seth*, trans. J. M. Robinson, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, and trans. and introduced by J. Goehring in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 30; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996); *Zostrianos*, Engl. trans. J. D. Turner in "Commentaire," in C. Barry, W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, J. D. Turner, *Zostrien (NH VIII, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 24. Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000), 483-662; and my translation of *Marsanes* as used in J. D. Turner, "Introduction," in W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, J. D. Turner, *Marsanès (NH X, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 27; Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000), 1-248.

1. the report on the "Sethoitae" by Pseudo-Tertullian, *Adversus omnes haereses* 2 (based on Hippolytus' lost *Syntagma*);
2. the "Barbeloite" report of Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* I.29); perhaps also a digest of certain "others" (*alii*) in *Adversus Haereses* I.30 (identified as Sethian/Ophites by Theodoret, *Haereticarum fabularum compendium* 1.13);
3. the reports on the Sethians and Archontics by Epiphanius (*Panarion* 26; 39-40), Pseudo-Tertullian (*Adversus omnes haereses* 2) and Filastrius (*Diversarum hereseon liber* 3);
4. the untitled text from the Bruce Codex (Bruce, *Untitled*);
5. fourteen treatises from the Nag Hammadi Codices (NHC) and one from the Berlin Gnostic Codex (BG 8502):

   The Apocryphon of John (*Ap. John* four copies in two versions: short [BG 8502,*2*; NHC III,*1*]; long [NHC II,*1*; NHC IV,*1*]);

   The Hypostasis of the Archons (*Hyp. Arch.*: NHC II,*4*);

   The Holy Book of the Invisible Spirit, customarily named the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (*Gos. Egypt.*: NHC III,*2*; NHC IV,*2*);

   The Apocalypse of Adam (*Apoc. Adam*: NHC V,*5*);

   The Three Steles of Seth (*Steles Seth*: NHC VII,*5*);

   Zostrianos (*Zost.*: VIII,1);

   Marsanes (NHC X,*1*);

   Melchizedek (*Melch.*: NHC IX,*1*);

   The Thought of Norea (*Norea*: NHC IX,*2*);

   Allogenes (NHC XI,*3*); and

   The Trimorphic Protennoia (*Trim. Prot.* NHC XIII,*1*).

A recent proposal to add another Nag Hammadi treatise to the Sethian corpus has been made recently by B. Layton, namely *The Thunder, Perfect Mind* (NHC VI,*2*), which he hypothesizes to be an offshoot (along with certain materials in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the untitled text dubbed *On the Origin of the World*, NHC II,*5*) of a certain *Gospel*

of Eve cited by Epiphanius (*Panarion* 26.2.6).[6] Although the untitled treatise from NHC II, *On the Origin of the World*, contains no distinctive Sethian mythologumena, and therefore should be excluded from membership in this group, it is nonetheless closely related to the *Hypostasis of the Archons*; indeed they both may stem from a common Sethian parent.[7]

Yet one more Nag Hammadi treatise might be added to the Sethian corpus, namely, the short piece consisting presently of two fragmentary papyrus leaves, *Hypsiphrone* (NHC XI,*4*), which narrates the descent of Hypsiphrone ("haughty, lofty one") from the "place of her virginity" during which she conversed with a being named Phainops, who is associated with a "fount of blood." To judge from the name "Hypsiphrone" ("high-minded one") one may have to do here with the Sethian figure of Eleleth, one of the traditional Sethian Four Luminaries, called "sagacity" or "wisdom" in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* II 93,8-97,21, and whose name might be derived from Aramaic, אֵל־עַלִּיתָא "God of the height," which might correspond to Greek ὑψιφρόνη.[8] Even though it

6. "The Riddle of the Thunder (NHC VI,2)," in C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson, eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986, 37-54); but cf. n. 76 below.

7. SCHENKE, "Gnostic Sethianism," *Rediscovery* 2.596-7.

8. In this connection, STROUMSA, *Another Seed*, 55 n.77, refers to 2 Enoch 18, where the size of the angelic "watchers" of Gen 6:1-4 who fathered the race of giants on mortal women is said to be "greater than that of giants." Cf. P.-H. POIRIER and M. TARDIEU, "Catégories du temps dans les écrits gnostiques non valentiniens," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 37 (1981), 3-13. The fount of blood may refer to the heavenly Adamas or heavenly archetype of Adam, described in *On the Origin of the World* (II 108,2-31) as the "enlightened bloody one" (based on the Hebrew pun on אָדָם, "man," and דָּם, "blood"). In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 56,22-59,9, Eleleth is probably the one responsible for the emission of the "blood drop" enshrining the image of the heavenly Adam. In this case, Hypsiphrone would be the Illuminator Eleleth, who in some Sethian texts is regarded as the abode of Sophia and certain "repentant souls" and in others (*Trim. Prot.*, *Gos. Egypt.*) is held responsible for the act usually ascribed to Sophia: that of producing the demiurge Yaldabaoth. Because of this ambiguity in Eleleth's character, the name Eleleth might also derive from הֵילֵל, which signifies the morning star (ἑωσφόρος) that in Is 14:12-15 ("I will ascend to heaven, above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.") lies at the origin of the myth of Lucifer's (ἑωσφόρος) fall. Eleleth/Hypsiphrone would also be responsible for the downward projection of Adamas, the image of God after whom the earthly Adam is modeled. In any case, Hypsiphrone is certainly a figure similar to that of the descending and restored Sophia. Phainops, "radiant-faced one," might then be a name for either the enlightened archetypal Adamas, or, since he seems to be distinguished from the "fount of blood," for the fiery angel Sabbaoth, the brother of the evil demiurge produced by the breath of Zôê, Pistis Sophia's daughter, in an effort to imprison the demiurge (the *Hypostasis of the Archons* 95,5-96,4).

9. See my "Hypsiphrone," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 5 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3.352-353.

bears no trace of the names of the other traditional Sethian divine beings, *Hypsiphrone* may in fact be very closely related to the other Sethian texts.[9]

III. Common Sethian Doctrines and Mythologumena

In varying ways, these treatises display a number of recurrent features which Schenke considers to form a "system" of Sethian mythologumena. These are:

1. The self-understanding of the Gnostics that they are the pneumatic seed of Seth: the *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Apocryphon of John*, *Three Steles of Seth*, *Melchizedek*, *Zostrianos*.
2. Seth as the heavenly-earthly savior of his seed: the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and perhaps under different names in *Allogenes*, *Marsanes*, *Zostrianos*, and the Illuminator of the *Apocalypse of Adam*.
3. The heavenly trinity of the Father (Invisible Spirit), Mother (Barbelo), and Son (Autogenes): the *Apocryphon of John*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, the *Thought of Norea*, perhaps *Marsanes*.
4. A division of the aeon of the Mother Barbelo into the triad of Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes: the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Marsanes*.
5. The Four Luminaries (φωστῆρες) of the Son Autogenes (Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai, and Eleleth), who constitute the dwelling places of the heavenly Adam, Seth, and the seed of Seth: the *Apocryphon of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Zostrianos*, *Melchizedek*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*.
6. The evil Demiurge Yaldabaoth who tried to destroy the seed of Seth: the *Apocryphon of John*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*.

7. The division of history into three ages and the appearance of the savior in each age: the *Apocryphon of John*, *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*; the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.
8. A special prayer: the *Three Steles of Seth* NHC VII 125,24-126,17; *Allogenes* XI 54,11-37; and *Zostrianos* VIII 51,24-52,8; 86,13-24; 88,9-25.
9. A specific deployment of negative theology: *Apocryphon of John* and *Allogenes*.
10. A specific philosophical terminology: the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Marsanes*.
11. Obvious (secondary) Christianization: the *Apocryphon of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Melchizedek*.
12. The presupposition of a triad or tetrad of "ministers" of the Four Luminaries: Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo, Abrasax (or the like): *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Zostrianos*, *Melchizedek*, *Marsanes*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, perhaps the *Thought of Norea*.
13. The designation (in Coptic) "Pigeradamas" for Adamas: *Apocryphon of John*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, *Melchizedek*.

To this one should add:

14. The baptismal rite of the Five Seals: longer version of the *Apocryphon of John*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, (perhaps *Melchizedek*), which is related to an ascensional ritual in *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*.

Of these treatises, the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* both contain an extensive theogony and cosmogony. The *Apocryphon of John* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons* both contain an extensive anthropogony based on an interpretation of Genesis 1-9. The *Apocalypse of Adam* shares with the preceding a great interest in the connection between Adam, Eve and Seth, as well as upon the flood, yet does not follow the text of Genesis as closely as the others. The *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Three Steles of Seth* share an obvious tripartite structure, yet the former presents the threefold descent of the divine First Thought Protennoia/Barbelo, while the latter provides a group of readers with doxological prayers to assist in a visionary ascent through the upper three levels of the aeonic world. The same ascent pattern is presented by *Zostrianos* (interpreted as a series of transcendental baptisms) and *Allogenes*, with much more concentration on the ontological stratification of the transcendent world. The figure of Norea, wife-sister of Seth, is featured in the *Thought of Norea* and the second part of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. A recitation of three salvific descents of the divine First Thought narrated in first person singular is featured in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and in the conclusion of the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John*. *Marsanes*' alphabetic speculation on the nature of the soul and its relation to the body is unique among the rest of the Sethian treatises, yet its first part clearly presents essentially the same inventory of the components of the divine realm as appear in *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and the *Three Steles of Seth*. The farthest removed from the core interests of the Sethian group is *Melchizedek*, which is highly Christian in content, with only a thin Sethian veneer, consisting of a revelation by Gamaliel, a minister of one of the Four Luminaries and a baptismal invocation of the names of some of the major transcendental *dramatis personae* found in the other treatises.[10]

In terms of application to the lifeways of their hypothetical Sethian Gnostic users, it appears that some treatises may have been aids to some form of worship, whether individual or communal (especially the baptismal rite), while others were directed primarily toward indoctrination. Among the former, one might include those in which prayer predominates: the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (especially the conclusion), the *Three Steles of Seth*, the *Thought of Norea*, and perhaps *Melchizedek*. Among the more didactic treatises, certain sections of the dialogue between John and Jesus in the *Apocryphon of John* (a revelation dialogue) and between Norea and Eleleth in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* might lend themselves to group catechetical (ἐρωταποκρίσις or question/answer format) purposes. Although the content of the *Apocalypse of Adam* (a testament) differs greatly from that of *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* (both are heavenly ascent apocalypses) and *Marsanes*, all four are didactic records of revelations received by figures of signal importance in Sethian tradition, namely Adam, and perhaps Marsanes, Allogenes (perhaps an *alter ego* of Seth), and Zostrianos (legendary grandfather of Zoroaster); even though these treatises contain instances of prayers and hymn-like pas-

10. Namely Barbelo, Doxomedon, the Light Oroiael (and probably Harmozel, Daveithe and Eleleth), the Man of Light Pigeradamas, and Mirocheirothetos (cf. Meirothea).

sages, their use seems to be limited to a heavenly rather than earthly liturgy. The *Trimorphic Protennoia* seems to have had a didactic (or possibly polemical) purpose, yet the hymnic quality of its first-person singular aretalogical sections and the sporadic presence of first person plural responses (XIII 36,33-37,3; 38,28-30; 42,19-25) suggests their use in an actual baptismal liturgy.

Most of the Sethian treatises present or presuppose a protology or myth of origins and a scheme of salvation that includes four basic topics: the *theogony*, or narrative genealogy of the divine beings; the *cosmogony*, or narrative of the production of the psycho-physical world of daily experience; the *anthropogony*, or narrative of the birth of the first human beings, including the origin of the evils that plague human existence; and the *soteriology*, or means by which humanity will be extricated from their defective situation in a faulted world and reunited with their ultimate point of origin in the divine world.

The manner in which these topics are presented suggests that Sethian Gnosticism seems to be a phenomenon that arose in close proximity with some form of Judaism. The treatises portray the divine world as if it were a great heavenly temple filled with a choir of spiritual beings (aeons) engaged in a heavenly liturgy directed to the praise of the supreme. As the supreme Invisible Spirit authorizes rank upon rank of aeonic beings to come into existence, from the moment of their creation onwards, they stand in attendance and render praise to their predecessors. What is more, several of the Sethian treatises include a selective reworking of important episodes from the early chapters of the book of Genesis. For the Sethians, the creator god in Genesis is an inferior being named Yaldabaoth, not the true supreme God praised by the aeons (the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*). Moreover, the manner of his creative acts is portrayed as a direct parody of the demiurge, the creator god of Plato's *Timaeus*. As the one who presides directly over the created order, this Archon ("ruler") or Archigenetor ("creator"), is usually portrayed as having several of his own offspring as his henchmen ("archons," or "authorities") who function rather like the younger gods (νέοι θεοί) of Plato's *Timaeus*, to whom the demiurge assigns the task of incarnating newly created human souls into human bodies. Some Sethian texts also regard the plurality in this family of "archons" as the explanation for the plural pronouns in such passages as Genesis 1:26 ("Let us make the human

being after our image"). Since the commandments from the chief archon do not really come "from on high" that is, from the true God, they need not, and usually must not, be obeyed. Once the first human being is created, the chief Archon commands him not to eat of the tree of knowledge ("of Gnosis"). To disobey this command and eat of this tree was viewed by the Sethians, as by most Gnostics, as a means of appropriating the saving knowledge ("Gnosis") of their divine origin rather than as a commission of sin (the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*). For the Sethians, the Archon's expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise was a pitiful and desperate act, motivated out of fear, frustration, and revenge, rather than a just punishment for disobedience. Thus, a principal feature of several Sethian protological texts is an interpretation of Jewish scripture that appears to challenge a "standard" reading of Genesis, but also had the merit of explaining certain of its puzzling features, such as the occurrence of plural pronouns for the supposedly unitary deity and that deity's reluctance for his creatures to share in divine knowledge.[11]

Moreover, some of the central characters in the Sethian treatises seem to derive from Jewish traditions. One such mythological figure is Wisdom (Sophia), who in several treatises (the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Zostrianos*, and perhaps *Norea*) plays the crucial mediating role between the transcendent realm of perfection and the created cosmos, either as the ultimate source of Matter or as the mother of the Archon creator. Personified Wisdom is a familiar figure in certain ancient Jewish documents, assisting God in the creation of the world and mediating divine power and revelation to humankind (Proverbs 1-8, Sirach,

11. K. W. TRÖGER, *Altes Testament – Frühjudentum – Gnosis: Neue Studien zu "Gnosis und Bibel"* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1980); B. A. PEARSON, "Jewish sources in Gnostic literature," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus*, ed. M. E. Stone (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 2,2; Assen/Maastricht and Philadelphia: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 1984), 2.443-81; IDEM, "Use, authority and exegesis of Mikra in Gnostic literature," in: *Mikra: Text, translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. M. J. Mulder and Harry Sysling (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 2,1; Assen/Maastricht and Philadelphia: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press, 1988), 1.635-652; and IDEM, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

Wisdom of Solomon). In addition, the Archon and other rulers and angels who control the cosmos in the Sethian texts bear an unmistakable resemblance to various "fallen" or rebellious angels featured in certain later Jewish literature.[12]

While all the Sethian treatises owe something of their content to Jewish tradition and popular Platonic metaphysical doctrines, the question of Christian influence is less clear. Some of them (the *Three Steles of Seth*; *Allogenes*; *Marsanes*; *Norea*) seem to contain no Christian features at all. Some display possible, but debatable, traces of Christian motifs (*Zostrianos* and the *Apocalypse of Adam*). Others have been editorially "Christianized" by the addition of NT citations (the *Hypostasis of the Archons*), Christological glosses (the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Untitled* text of *Codex Bruce*), or by casting an entire treatise into the form of a post-resurrection dialogue between Jesus and John the son of Zebedee, as in the case of the *Apocryphon of John*. Only one, *Melchizedek*, seems to have originated as a first-hand Christian interpretation of Christ's nature and significance reminiscent of the NT "letter" to the Hebrews. Jewish exegetical tradition seems strongest in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and perhaps the *Apocryphon of John*.

Finally, almost all the treatises exhibit the influence of a broadly Platonic worldview by distinguishing the earthly, visible realm of change and becoming from the transcendent, invisible realm of permanence and stability as well as by adopting the associated doctrines of archetype and image and model and copy, and the notion of a world creator broadly patterned on the demiurgic figure of Plato's *Timaeus*. Such influence is very noticeable in the *Apocryphon of John*, but it is overwhelming in the four treatises *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*, which effect a clear rapprochement with the technical metaphysics of contemporary Middle Platonism in their presentation of the deployment and ontological structuring of the divine world, their portrayal of a specific technique of contemplative ascent to the highest level of

12. E.g., 1 Enoch; cf. STROUMSA, *Another Seed*; I. P. CULIANU, "The angels of the nations and the origins of Gnostic dualism," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 91; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 78-91.

reality, and the wholesale use of specifically philosophical terminology.[13]

A. The Sethian Revelation *par excellence*: the *Apocryphon of John*

Discovered in the Berlin Coptic Codex 8502 in 1896 but not published until 1955, the *Apocryphon* ("Secret Book") *of John*, is probably the most widely known of all the Sethian treatises. The popularity and importance of the *Apocryphon of John* in antiquity is clearly evident. It now survives in no less than four separate manuscripts, a huge number of copies compared with what we have for most gnostic texts. Two manuscripts (Nag Hammadi Codices II and IV) contain a somewhat longer version of the *Apocryphon of John*, while the other two (Nag Hammadi Codex III and the Berlin Gnostic Codex 8502) contain somewhat shorter versions. All four codices contain other writings, but in the three Nag Hammadi codices, the *Apocryphon of John* is always the first tractate copied into the codex. In addition, in the first (I.29) of his five volume work *Adversus Haereses*, the late second century CE anti-gnostic Christian bishop Irenaeus offered a digest of a work very similar to the first part of the *Apocryphon of John*. While Irenaeus attributed this work to certain "Barbeloites," a later version of Irenaeus' report by the same title (*Adversus omnes haereses* 2, falsely attributed to Tertullian), ascribed this work to certain "Sethians" (*Sethoitae*). In addition, Irenaeus went on in his next chapter (*Adversus Haereses* I.30) to summarize a work that has many points of contact with the second part of the *Apocryphon of John*, attributing it to certain "others" (*alii*) whom Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Haereticarum fabularum compendium* 1.13) later identified as Sethians or Ophites.

The *Apocryphon of John* contains what purport to be secret teachings revealed by Christ in a post-resurrection appearance to the apostle John the son of Zebedee. The opening words describe a distressing confrontation in the Jerusalem Temple between John and a Pharisee Arimanios,[14]

13. Such as: "being," "identity," "difference," "entity," "quantity," "quality," "time," "eternity," "existence," "vitality," "mentality," "life," "intellect," "individuals," "universals," "parts," "wholes," "non-being," "truly existing," "attribute," and many more.

14. "Arimanios" seems to be a graecicized form of "Ahriman," the evil cosmic principle in Zoroastrian teaching. The narrative frame, which presupposes John son of Zebedee as the author of the *Apocryphon of John*, is a later addition to a text that originally had no Johannine concerns, and must have been written after it had be-

who charges that "this Nazarene" whom John and the other disciples had followed had in fact deceived them and lured them away from their ancestral Jewish traditions. Lacking answers to this accusation, John departs to a deserted place to agonize over his doubts. He realizes that his savior had not really explained why and how he had entered the world, had not clearly explained the "Father" of whom he had spoken, nor the nature of the "Aeon" (eternal age or realm) that he predicted to be the ultimate destiny of his disciples. In the course of these reflections, Christ suddenly appears to him in the midst of a brilliant light, first as a youth, then an old man, and then as a small child. Then as Christ begins to speak, John realizes that this luminescent being speaking to him was the same one who had earlier appeared to all the disciples in the form of Jesus the Nazarene.

Christ's ensuing lengthy discourse, punctuated at certain points by John's requests for clarification, constitutes a systematic treatise on the generation of the divine realm (theogony), of the cosmos at large (cosmogony), and of humankind (anthropogony), on its "fall" into oblivion, and on its ultimate salvation (soteriology). It consists of two parts, the Savior's lengthy monologue on theogony and cosmogony, and a subsequent dialogue between John and the Savior on anthropogony and soteriology.

In the first part, Christ reveals to John the nature of the supreme deity (the primal divine triad, Father, Mother and Child), the divine realm brought into being by him (i.e., the "All" or "Pleroma" of light organized into four great Luminaries, Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai and Eleleth) and its relation to the created order; how the creation, with its flaws and shortcomings originated (through the fall of Sophia/Wisdom and the creation of a lower world at the hands of her ill-begotten son Yaldabaoth and his demonic underlings) and became dominated by the

come generally accepted that John, son of Zebedee, was the author of both the Fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation. John's questions look back to the now canonical Gospel and Apocalypse of John, and deal with matters for which he does not yet have the answer when he produced these works, and hence they also look forward to the new revelation offered by Jesus in the body of the *Apocryphon of John* (the appointment and mission of the Savior; the nature of the first divine principle; and the final destiny of those who belong to the unwavering race). This new revelation offered by Jesus supplements the Gospel and Revelation of John, thus affording its reader a new and more authoritative perspective on these previous Johannine texts.

inferior powers that now control it. This part concludes with Yaldabaoth's boast, "I am a jealous God and there is no other God beside me" (II 13,8-9), which marks the point of transition to the second part of the revelation, a dialogue wherein Christ makes the first of many textual allusions to Genesis.

The second part of the *Apocryphon of John* contains Christ's explanation of the true meaning of Genesis 1-7, revealing how Yaldabaoth created Adam as an initially weak copy, not yet spiritual, of the image of the archetypal human projected below from the divine world. John then asks the first of ten questions, introducing an element of dialogue not found in the first part; and the subject-matter shifts from theogony and cosmogony to soteriology and anthropogony. This part goes on to reveal how Adam received his true spiritual nature, received the spiritual Eve, Epinoia, as a helper, was enlightened by eating of the tree of knowledge, was expelled from paradise, and begot Seth. After a short dialogue on the salvation of various types of souls from the incarnational cycle and on the origin of the wicked spirit, Christ's revelation concludes with the story of Yaldabaoth's further enslavement of the human race through the origination of Fate, the coming of the flood, and how intercourse between the angels and human women led to humanity's sexual enslavement. The savior then departs to the aeonic world with a reminder that salvation is certain, since the divine Mother has already enlightened her seed.

As Michael Waldstein observes,[15]

> While these two parts differ both in content and form, they are closely connected. The first part sets the two-tiered stage of the overall drama, the upper world of light and the lower world of darkness, introduces the main *dramatis personae*, and narrates the first disastrous event that sets the entire drama in motion, the loss/theft of heavenly power to the lower world in the fall of Sophia. The second part, which plays on the same double stage, reverses the downward movement of the first by telling how the lost/stolen heavenly power is recovered (soteriology). Sophia's repentance stands at the beginning of this recovery, the creation and instruction of the human race forms its substance. The shift in form from a systematic treatise to a Midrash on Genesis is an aspect of the over-arching unity between the *Apocryphon of John*'s first and second part: the first tells of pre-Genesis

15. M. WALDSTEIN, *The Apocryphon of John: A Curious Eddy in the Stream of Hellenistic Judaism*" (privately circulated preprint of August, 1995), 82.

realities and events of which Moses had no inkling; the second offers a re-reading of Genesis 1-7.

In so doing, the *Apocryphon of John* "splits the Jewish creator god into an upper God of pure goodness, who is personally identified as the transcendent God of Middle-Platonic theology who retained some central features of the God of Israel, and an evil lower God who was personally identified as the God of Israel, but is portrayed as a parody of the Platonic demiurge."[16]

The drift of Christ's revelation is as follows:[17] He begins by locating the origin of all things in the mind of the sole supreme deity called the "Invisible Spirit." This deity is so transcendent to any conceivable attributes that it can only be described negatively ("it is neither X nor non-X, but something superior to either"); none besides the Spirit itself can grasp the perfection of its own nature.

Christ's revelation then proceeds to an elaborate account of the nature, origin and deployment of a divine world that sprang into being from the Spirit's act of self conception: the Invisible Spirit's first thought or self-image emerges as a separately-existing, personified divine mind named "Barbelo." Characterized as the "First Thought" or "Image" of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo also has other functional attributes: conceived in dominantly feminine terms, Barbelo is also identified as the divine Providence and the First (i.e., archetypal) Human, the very image of the Invisible Spirit who is itself perhaps the absolute Human. Although she is a single being, she is also triple-male, triple-powered, and triple-named. In these capacities, Barbelo serves as the principal savior figure of Sethian theology; she is the mediator between the Invisible Spirit and all else; she is the bestower of divine providence and of human salvation. She, rather than the Adam of the book of Genesis, is the true image of God, the prototypical "First Human" who mediates the divine image to everything else, including Adam himself. Finally, even though both Barbelo and the Invisible Spirit transcend gender altogether,

16. M. WALDSTEIN, "The Primal Triad in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (ed. J. D. Turner and A. McGuire; Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 44; Leiden, New York, & Köln: E. J. Brill, 1997), 154.

17. I here follow the compact but thorough summary of M. A. WILLIAMS, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument of Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 8-12.

Barbelo is also the "Mother"; as the divine consort of the "Father" (the Invisible Spirit), she brings to completion the process of divine self-reflection by giving birth to the divine self-begotten Child Autogenes ("Self-generated"). Thereupon a host of other divine beings come to surround this Father-Mother-Child trinity, taking up residence in four great aeonic choirs headed by the Four Luminaries established by the self-generated Child. Each successive entity comes into being and is provided with a feminine consort as a result of the Invisible Spirit's "consent" to each prospective parent's request for the addition of a new offspring. In an attitude of perfect order, tranquillity, and reverence, these beings stand in attendance as a heavenly court, continually glorifying their source, the Invisible Spirit. Thereupon, the deployment of the divine realm comes to an end with the appearance of the "Perfect Human," (i.e., Pigeradamas, the prototype of the earthly Adam) and his child, Seth.

Suddenly, however, the peaceful unfolding of the divine world is shattered at its extreme periphery by the self-willed behavior of Sophia (Wisdom), the last of the divine attributes or attendants to appear. Rather than seeking the consent of the Invisible Spirit for a further act of self-imaging as did her predecessors, she relies on her own productive power and wisdom to produce her own offspring in honor of the Spirit, and does so without the aid of her appointed—but unidentified—male consort.

As a result, Sophia's child comes forth, but without the divine family likeness; it is instead abnormally ugly and malformed, resembling a lion-headed serpent, unlike its mother or any of the other divine entities made in the image of the First Human. Horrified at this result, Sophia names it Yaldabaoth (perhaps meaning "Yahweh God of hosts"), and carefully hides it in a cloud far from the divine household.

Yaldabaoth, also called Saklas ("fool"), Samael ("blind god") and other names, is, among other mythological entities, clearly identified with the creator God of Genesis. But he turns out to be even more self-willed than his mother, whose spiritual power he literally steals in order to begin creating a world of his own that he can control however he pleases. He immediately brings into being a gang of angelic subordinates as fellow archons (rulers) to help him control the realm of darkness below the luminescent divine world: the twelve angels of the zodiac, the seven archons of the seven planetary spheres, and others, many

that bear names reminiscent of various Hebraic-like names for the biblical creator god. Aware only of his mother Sophia who bore him, but completely unaware of the divine realm above her, his mother's stolen power moves him to unwittingly create a counterfeit world as a poor imitation of the higher divine realm which he can at best only imagine. And then he has the audacity to announce that *he*, Yaldabaoth, is *the* only god. His boast, "I am God and there is no god beside me," is a direct parody of similar declamations by the God of Jewish scripture (e.g., Is 45:5; 46:9).

In deep grief and sorrow over her error, Sophia begins part two of the drama by offering a prayer of repentance to the divine realm whose order she had unintentionally violated. Her prayer receives a positive response, but it is clear that her former status can only be restored once the deficiency in her creative activity has been corrected; until then, she must be content only to be elevated to the "Ninth," above the realm of the Archon she brought into being, but not yet to the divine realm.

The correction of the deficiency begins by disclosing to the lower realm that, contrary to Yaldabaoth's vain claim, all true divinity is far above. A divine voice, probably Barbelo's, proclaims: "Man exists, and the Son of Man," whereupon the holy Mother-Father Barbelo causes the true divine image, i.e., the "First Human"—perhaps a representation of herself—to be projected upon the chaotic sea of primordial matter upon which Yaldabaoth and his subordinates have been constructing their false world. In an effort to maintain possession of his stolen creative power, Yaldabaoth beckons his fellow archons: "Let us create a human after the image of God and after our likeness," alluding to Gen 1:26-27: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness .... So God created man in his own image ...." Thereupon they fabricate the earthly Adam piece by piece, but the result is only an inert, soulless puppet, lying lifeless on the ground.

In order to animate the creature, the Mother-Father Barbelo tricks Yaldabaoth into blowing breath or spirit into the inert body—the same spirit he had stolen from his mother Sophia. Adam's body suddenly comes to life, shining with luminous intelligence far surpassing that of the archons. They try to pin the body back down by burying it in matter. They throw Adam into the Garden full of poisonous trees and command him not to eat of the tree of knowledge, lest he regain his intelligence and divine luminescence. Barbelo/Pronoia (providence, forethought)

responds by infusing Adam with some of her own Epinoia (afterthought, expressed thought), a luminous power called Zôê (life), who will appear in two forms: as the tree of knowledge, and as Eve, his spiritual, female counterpart. Desperate to get rid of the luminous spiritual Epinoia infused into Adam, Yaldabaoth tries to extract it through Adam's side and trap it in another created being, a woman. But only a part of the Epinoia is extracted, while the remainder, in the form of the spiritual Eve, remains hidden in Adam. Instead of being deceived, Adam immediately glimpses the spiritual Eve rather than her crafted image, which results in his sudden awakening and illumination. As if this were not enough, this version of Adam's enlightenment is also complemented with a parallel account of Adam's enlightenment through eating of the tree of knowledge, which has been similarly infused with the divine Epinoia; if anything, this act of disobeying the creator's prohibition results—in express distinction from the biblical account—in Adam's being doubly enlightened.

Cursing the very earth he made, Yaldabaoth expels the enlightened couple from the Garden. But as enlightened beings they are still superior to their creator, so Yaldabaoth comes up with yet another scheme to nullify their newly gained intelligence: implanting the humans with the desire for sexual intercourse. Yaldabaoth himself sets the example by seducing the earthly Eve, begetting two subhuman powers, Cain and Abel, who will procreate future generations that will be subjected to his control by the heavy chain of fate and the compulsion to procreate themselves by sexual intercourse. Unfortunately, Yaldabaoth rapes only an earthy simulacrum of Eve, whose spiritual power the Mother removed in the nick of time, while it is the now enlightened Adam that goes on to "know" the true Eve, who bears their child Seth, who like Adam possesses the human image of God, and is destined to father the "seed of Seth," a race of human beings who will likewise bear the image of the true God.

In retaliation, the hostile archons invent the power of Fate to enchain humanity in sin, ignorance, fear, and hopelessness. Repenting that he had created humans in the first place, Yaldabaoth attempts to destroy them in a flood—of darkness—but the divine Providence Barbelo intervenes once again and warns Noah, who escapes the darkness, along with those who listen to his preaching. Rather than being saved in the ark, the antediluvian seed of Seth through Noah is elevated to a heavenly

"place," apparently to the Four Luminaries, which provide aeonic dwellings for Adam, Seth, the seed of Seth, and even such of the rest of humanity as might repent from their immorality.[18] Evidently, with their elevation, the primordial seed of Seth disappears from history, leaving behind their progeny, the earthly Sethites, to await a future deliverance. Although the evil progeny of Cain is destroyed in the flood, the earthly seed of Seth must face a new threat, for the *Apocryphon of John* reverses the Genesis sequence (descent of the sons of God followed by the flood) at a crucial point, with the result that the earth is repopulated with a new generation of corrupt human beings. For even after the flood, Yaldabaoth next sends his angels to have intercourse with those earthly women who survive the flood so as to create an "offspring of darkness" (cf. Gen 6:1-4). They fill them with lust for procreation and for other material things, thus blinding them to the God of truth and hardening their hearts from their time until the present.[19]

The longer versions of the *Apocryphon of John* (Codices II and IV) conclude with a long monologue by Pronoia/Barbelo in which she narrates in the first person her three salvific descents into the world of darkness to awaken her "seed" from their heavy sleep induced by the archontic powers and to elevate them into the supernal light by sealing them with "Five Seals." Several Sethian treatises present this final act of deliverance as a baptismal rite (the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Melchizedek*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Zostrianos*, and perhaps *Marsanes*), usually called "the Five Seals" (the *Trimorphic Protennoia*; the longer versions of *the Apocryphon of John*; the *Gospel of the Egyptians*; and the *Untitled* text of *Codex Bruce*). In the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, this rite combines a spiritual rapture of Protennoia/Barbelo's fallen "members" into the light with a baptism in "living

18. By exegetical inversion, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 56,4-21; cf. *Apoc. Adam*, NHC V 75,17-27) apparently calls this "place" Sodom and Gomorrah, which Yaldabaoth tries to destroy by fire and brimstone, whereupon the seed of Seth is suddenly snatched up to the third aeon in the Light Daveithai.

19. As further acts of archontic retaliation, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* adds a great cosmic conflagration (of Sodom and Gomorrah?), followed by famines, plagues, temptations and persecutions. Seth responds by requesting Aerosiel, Selmechiel and 400 ethereal angels as guardians for his seed until the consummation of this aeon and its archons, when Barbelo will cause Seth himself or the divine Logos—perhaps in the form of Jesus—to descend and liberate his seed by means of the holy baptism of the Five Seals.

water," (meaning both the physical "flowing water" of baptism and the celestial living water, characterized as light, divine wisdom, and Gnosis).[20] The rite serves to vivify the initiate's sluggish psycho-physical complex with enlightened self-knowledge by investing it with a luminous garment, which is tantamount to a baptism in living water, a royal enthronement and glorification, and ultimate transportation into the Light.[21]

Thus the ultimate restoration of Seth's progeny, who continue to live on earth, will be accomplished in the last days; its advent is marked by Barbelo's final act of raising up her seed by appearing either in her own person or in that of her child (the Logos or Autogenes or Seth or Christ or other similar figures) to reveal to the Sethians of those days—that is the contemporary readers of the *Apocryphon*—the true account of their spiritual origins and nature. During its descent, her child appears in various guises at various levels of the spiritual and material cosmos. In the process, her child manages to overthrow the dominion of the demonic rulers and to awaken the seed of Seth—presently entrapped in an earthly delusion—to the recognition of their true spiritual identity by presenting them with written revelations of their sacred history and providing a cultic initiatory rite of enlightenment which will elevate them to the divine realm. In the *Apocryphon of John*, salvation for humans lies in the recollection effected by the hearing of the foregoing mythic narrative itself. To know this whole story is to awaken oneself to what it is to be human, to regain the power to resist the devices of the evil creator, and, upon death to escape forever the confines of the body, and reside as a pure soul in the divine world. In this regard, the longer versions of the

20. Such water is a biblical metaphor for wisdom: Jer 2:13, 17:14; Zech 14:8; Ps 65:9; Prov 13:14, 14:27, 16:22, 18:4; Sirach 16:3, 24:30-33; Jn 4:11-12, 7:39; Rev 7:17, 21:7, 22:1, 17.

21. In these baptismal contexts, one finds recurrent mentioning of such figures as Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus the Living Water (*Gos. Egypt.*; *Apoc. Adam*; *Zost*); Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo and Abrasax the servants of the Four Luminaries; Micheus, Michar (often with Mnesinous; *Gos. Egypt.*; *Apoc. Adam*; *Zost.*; *Trim. Prot.*; *Bruce*) who preside over the spring of living water; the purifier Barpharanges (*Zost.*) or Sesengen[bar]pharanges (*Gos. Egypt.*); the guardians Akramas and Strempsouchos (*Zost.*; *Gos. Egypt.*); and various "presiders": Seldao, Elainos, Olses and Eurymaios (*Gos. Egypt.*; *Zost.*). Many of these figures are lacking in treatises which do not use baptismal imagery to mark the stages of celestial ascent (*Allogenes*; *Steles Seth*; *Marsanes*) or the descent of the savior (*Ap. John*; *Hyp. Arch.*; *Norea*; some are present in *Apoc. Adam.*, *Trim. Prot.* and all occur in *Gos. Egypt*).

Apocryphon of John portray a nearly universal salvation; according to the dialogue on the salvation of different sorts of souls (II 25,16-27,31), eternal punishment is reserved only for apostates, while all others are virtually guaranteed eventually entering the "repose of the aeons."

B. The Transcendent World of the Sethians

Much of the mythological narrative and picture of the world narrated in the *Apocryphon of John* is reflected in the other Sethian treatises as well. Most of them locate true reality in a transcendent world presided over by a divine trinity, Father, Mother, and Son. The ultimate deity is the Invisible Spirit, perhaps originally called "Man."[22]

Connected with him is a subordinate female figure, his First Thought, usually called Barbelo or Protennoia/Pronoia ("First Thought") or Ennoia ("Thought" in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.29; the *Apocryphon of John*; *Allogenes*; the *Three Steles of Seth*; *Marsanes*; the *Trimorphic Protennoia*; *Melchizedek*), the merciful Mother-Father (the *Apocryphon of John*). Barbelo is almost always associated with a further triad of beings: she may be accompanied by the three attributes Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility and Eternal Life (the *Apocryphon of John*; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.29; the *Gospel of the Egyptians*), or she may herself act upon the lower world in three successive modalities of Voice, Speech, and Word (the *Trimorphic Protennoia*), or deploy herself in the form of a hierarchy of modalities named Kalyptos ("Hidden One"), Protophanes ("First-

22. Note the repeated occurrence of Sophia's revelation to her son Yaldabaoth, "Man exists and the Son of Man," i.e. the supreme god and his son, his image, the archetypal, heavenly Adam. See H.-M. SCHENKE, *Der Gott "Mensch" in der Gnosis: Ein religionsgeschichtliche Beitrag zur Diskussion über die paulinischen Anschauung von der Kirche als Leib Christi* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962). According to Schenke, this idea can appear in two basic patterns: 1) the high deity is himself conceived as the first or primal man whose appearance to the creative powers provides a model for the creation of the earthly (and therefore second) man, and 2) the high deity produces first a heavenly man of like nature (often called the "son of man") who in turn becomes the direct prototype of the earthly (and therefore third) man. In the *Apocryphon of John*, there are thus three father-son pairs: 1) the first Man, the Invisible Spirit, and his son, the first Son of man, the Autogenes Christ; 2) the "first man to come forth," the heavenly Adam and his son, the heavenly Seth, again a Son of Man; and 3) the terrestrial Adam and his son Seth. To complicate matters further, though she is his feminine counterpart, Barbelo too can be called "First Man" (E.g., *Ap. John* II 5,7; 6,3-4).

appearing One") and Autogenes (*Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Marsanes*).

The third member of the divine triad is the Son, usually called Autogenes ("Self-begotten One"), "Triple-male Child," the Son of the (high deity) "Man." He is closely connected—and perhaps originally identical—with the archetypal Adam called Pigeradamas (perhaps for ὁ γεραιὸς Ἀδαμας, Heb. קַדְמוֹן אָדָם; *the Apocryphon of John*; the *Three Steles of Seth*; *Zostrianos*; *Melchizedek*), or the divine Adamas (the *Three Steles of Seth*; *Zostrianos*). In the Christianized treatises, he is identified with the heavenly Christ (the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*). These beings constitute the principal Sethian triad "Father, Mother, Son."

The spiritual son of the heavenly Adamas is Seth or Emmacha Seth, sometimes called "the Child of the Child," which makes him Son of the Son of the Man, that is, the son of Adamas, the son of the supreme deity (see note 22). Functioning as redeemer (the *Gospel of the Egyptians*) or as mediator for the redeemer Pigeradamas (the *Three Steles of Seth*), Seth can manifest himself in the form of anonymous earthly figures like Allogenes (ἀλλογενής, "stranger," "of another race"[23] in *Allogenes* and in Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.5) or, in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, as the Logos who "puts on" Jesus.

Seth has descendants, called the "seed" of Seth, who constitute the "unshakable," "undominated," or "great" race. This includes not only the seven primordial Sethite generations of Genesis 5 (Enosh, Kenan, Mahalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech and perhaps Noah and certain of his sons), but all the subsequent progeny of Seth who have kept their race uncontaminated with worldly practices. Just as Adamas, Seth, and the primordial, antediluvian Sethite generations reside in the transcendent world, so also their subsequent postdiluvian offspring who dwell on earth have their true home in heaven; these latter constitute the membership of the Sethian gnostic community, the so-called "unshakable race" i.e., the historical Sethians. The "true home" of Adamas, Seth, and the divine and earthly seed of Seth has its respective location in one of the four supra-celestial aeons called the Four Luminaries (φωστῆρες; namely, Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth) established for them by the divine Autogenes (*the Gospel of the Egyptians*,

23. ἄλλο γένος cf. Seth as "the other seed," the σπέρμα ἕτερον of Gen 4:25 (LXX) cited above.

the Apocryphon of John, the Trimorphic Protennoia, Zostrianos, Melchizedek, and the *Thought of Norea*; cf. their absence in *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*, while only Eleleth occurs in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*).

C. Two Patterns of the Salvific Process

A major bifurcation arises among the Sethian treatises precisely in view of various, usually triadic, schematizations and structurings of the process by which one attains saving enlightenment. One group of tractates conceptualizes the means of attaining enlightenment as a horizontal, temporally successive sequence of descents into this world by a heavenly savior who reveals the upper world, while another group conceptualizes the means of attaining enlightenment as vertical ascent through a succession of mental states in which the Gnostic is assimilated to ever higher levels of being.[24]

1. The "Descent Pattern": Enlightenment by a Descending Revealer

As we have seen, the *Apocryphon of John* narrates three saving missions inaugurated by Pronoia/Barbelo, the merciful Mother-Father. First, she causes the image of God, the First Man, to be projected below, to serve as the archetype for the molding of the earthly Adam. Second, she descends as the Epinoia of Light who hides in Adam, is transferred to the spiritual Eve or to the tree of knowledge, and initially enlightens him, whereupon she bears Seth, son of the enlightened Adam, and later acts to elevate Seth's antediluvian seed into a heavenly dwelling and help Noah to escape the flood. Third and finally, the blessed Mother-Father appears in the form of the resurrected Christ who communicates the entire Sethian history as a saving revelation to his disciple John. In effect, this sequence of three epiphanies constitute a sacred history of divine dispensations or stages of salvation.

In the *Apocalypse of Adam* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, there is a similar tripartitioning of history from the creation onwards, whose epochs are marked by the salvific responses of the divine realm to the ignorant creator's—called Sakla(s), "fool," rather then Yaldabaoth—various attempts to enslave the seed of Seth: 1) at the time of the flood, whereupon the seed is rescued by certain angels; 2) at the time of the rain of fire and brimstone on the holy dwelling of the Sethians in Sodom and Gomorrah, whereupon the seed is rescued by the servants of the Four Luminaries; these acts will be followed by 3) a future but final act of salvation when he will destroy the power of the archons and redeem his seed from death. While the final savior is an unidentified "Illuminator" in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the third saving descent will be conducted by the heavenly Seth himself when he will put on Jesus like a garment and confer upon his seed a baptism by which he "nails down" the powers of thirteen aeons.

In the *Trimorphic Protennoia* this scheme is worked out in three successive descents of Protennoia-Barbelo: First, as Father, she is the divine but as yet inarticulate Voice of the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit who presides over the establishing of the heavenly dwellings for her members and descends to chaos to loosen their bonds. Second, as Mother, she is the articulate Speech of the Thought who descends to overthrow the old aeon ruled by the Archigenetor and his evil powers and announces the dawn of the new age. Third, as the Son, she is the fully articulated Logos who adopts the guise of successively lower powers, descends to and enters the "tents" of her members, puts on Jesus, rescues him from the cross, and leads her members back to the light by means of the baptismal ascent ritual of the Five Seals. This horizontal scheme of three descents is also present in—and may have been derived from—the three-stanzaed monologue of Pronoia concluding the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 30,11-31,25), where she narrates her three saving descents that culminate in the baptismal rite of the Five Seals.

2. The "Ascent Pattern": Enlightenment by Contemplative Ascent

On the other hand, the treatises *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Marsanes*, exhibit a more vertical, non-temporal, suprahistorical scheme in which salvation is brought below, not by successive descents of a revealer or redeemer, but is rather achieved by the Gnostic himself in the course of a graded series of visionary ascents. Here there are no saving descents of the divine Mother, no sacred history with its saving dispensations, and no cosmic overthrow of the antidivine powers. One finds instead accounts of an exemplary visionary utilizing a self-performable technique of successive stages of mental detachment from

24. See J. D. TURNER, "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 324-351 (esp. 341-351).

the world of multiplicity, and a corresponding self-assimilation to the ever more-refined levels of being to which one's consciousness ascends, culminating in an absolute mental and spiritual stability characteristic of the supreme deity itself.

This group of treatises is distinguished by a wholesale adaptation of ontological and epistemological terms and concepts drawn from contemporary Platonic metaphysics not evident in the other Sethian treatises. They of course continue to exhibit many points of contact with treatises of the descent pattern: Thus *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* continue to imagine certain features of gnostic enlightenment in terms of the traditional Sethian baptismal imagery, and—together with the *Three Steles of Seth*—they contain the names of divine figures prominent in relatively non-Platonizing treatises: these include the Invisible Spirit and its Silence; the Virgin Barbelo and her three powers; Pigeradamas, Adamas and the Triple-Male child (equivalent to the Autogenes Son), Barbelo, and certain of her doubles such as Youel/Yoel, Meirothea, Prophania, and Plesithea. Yet these texts lack prominent Sethian themes, such as the apocalyptic schematization of history and narratives of the periodic descent of such a redeemer or revealer. They devote little attention to narrating the creation of the world and the involvement therein of Sophia and the origin of her demiurgical offspring. And they lack altogether the Sethian anthropogony portraying the creation of mankind and his primeval history drawn from the exegesis of Genesis 1-6. Finally, these texts show no manifest evidence of Christianization or of concern with issues raised by Christianity. I therefore designate these four treatises the "Platonizing Sethian treatises."

According to *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*, the ascent proceeds through the levels of the Aeon of Barbelo, through the levels of the Triple Powered One of the Invisible Spirit, and culminates in a vision of the supreme Unknown deity. *Zostrianos* portrays a similar ascent, but apparently only to the mid-point of the Barbelo Aeon. In the *Three Steles of Seth*, after a preliminary revelation by Seth in the first person singular, he speaks for all Gnostics (in the first person plural) who in concert with him ascend in acts of vision and praise through the aeon of Autogenes to the aeon of Barbelo and finally succeed in the vision of the high deity who "truly preexists." In fact, since the cosmology, transcendental ontology and contemplative epistemology of these four treatises are so similar to one another and to demonstrably Platonic exemplars, it is

apparent that they form a closely related group, which can be referred to as the "Platonizing Sethian treatises."

To claim that Platonic influence dominates these "ascent pattern" treatises is not to deny the vital influence of Platonism throughout the entire Sethian corpus. The Sethian treatises of the descent pattern all exhibit the influence of a broadly Platonic worldview by virtue of their distinction of the earthly, visible realm of change and becoming from the transcendent, invisible realm of permanence and stability, as well as their adoption of the associated doctrines of archetype/image and model/copy, and the notion of a world creator broadly patterned on the demiurgic figure of Plato's *Timaeus*. Some treatises seem also to conceptualize the revelatory process itself along the lines of the Stoic and—eventually Platonic—distinction between thought as "internal logos" (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and speech as "expressed logos" (λόγος προφορικός); this conception is particularly well-developed by *Trimorphic Protennoia*'s doctrine of progressive revelation through the successively more articulate modes of external expression by which Barbelo-Protennoia, the divine First Thought, manifests herself: in her first descent as masculine Voice (ϩⲣⲟⲟⲩ = ἦχος), in her second descent as feminine Speech (ⲥⲙⲏ = φωνή), and finally in her third descent as the masculine Logos. Of all the descent treatises, it is the *Apocryphon of John* that exhibits the most points of contact with Platonism, especially in the initial theogony with its Parmenidean negative theology, its derivation of plurality from an original unity by means of a female principle that is emanated by the self-reflection of the supreme deity, its model of the emanation of spiritual beings through a process of procession and contemplative reversion upon their source pictured as a kind of heavenly liturgy. The same is true of its doctrine of archetypes and images and models and copies, and its parody of the Platonic demiurge.[25] But the

25. See especially M. WALDSTEIN, "The Primal Triad in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 44. Leiden, New York, & Köln: E. J. Brill, 1997), 154-187, esp. 183: "*Ap. John*'s Middle-Platonic transcendent deity gazes around himself into the primal waters of Genesis 1 and discerns in them his own reflection, Barbelo-Wisdom, the effulgence of his own light. This scene is closely linked to *Ap. John*'s reading of Genesis 1:3 (light shining forth) and 1:26 (appearance of the luminous human image on the waters of chaos). The later creation of Adam after the luminous image on the waters has its archetypal counterpart in the

Platonizing Sethian treatises draw even more heavily on the Platonic philosophical tradition, mainly from Middle Platonic doctrine, but even from Plato's dialogues themselves.

The Platonizing Sethian treatises model their conception of the visionary ascent upon that found in Plato's *Symposium* (210A-212A) and the parable of the cave in the *Republic* (VII 514-517A). *Zostrianos* draws its descriptions of the ideal world from those in the *Phaedo* (113D-114C), *Gorgias* (523A-6C), *Phaedrus* (248C-249C), and the *Republic* (X 614b-621b), it incorporates the doctrine of the paradigm, the demiurge, and the receptacle from the *Timaeus*, and it draws upon the doctrine of the modes of non-being in both the *Sophist* (240B, 254D) and *Parmenides* (162A). Both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* base their negative theology on an anonymous Middle Platonic commentary upon the *Parmenides* (137E-142A). *Zostrianos* shares its version of this negative theology word-for-word with Marius Victorinus' treatise against Arius (VIII 64,13-66,11 = *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-50,21 in part). And *Allogenes* (XI,62,28-63,25) shares another similar negative theology word-for word with the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 24,6-25,7; II 3,18-33). In fact, one may wonder to what extent the Platonic apocalypses such as the myth of Er in *Republic* X and its later imitations in Cicero's "Dream of Scipio" (*De Republica* VI) and Plutarch's (*De genio Socratis* 590A-592E) myth of Timarchus served as models for the authors of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*.

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mirroring of the transcendent deity in the waters surrounding it. The system of personal aeons with abstract names appears to be the result of the conflation of a list of Platonic ideas and orders of Jewish angels. The overall image of *Ap. John*'s upper world is that of a Jewish heavenly court. The members of the court not only contemplate, as Middle-Platonic hypostases do, but they participate in a heavenly liturgy described in the language of the Septuagint: they stand in attendance (παριστάναι) before God and glorify (δοξάζειν) him in songs of praise. The dialogue of prayer flashes back and forth between him and them. They ask him for favors; he graciously grants them; they respond with praise. Jewish genealogy (Adam, Seth and the descendants of Seth) is found on the various levels of being with higher genealogies acting as Platonic paradigms for lower ones. The multiplication of beings required for a heavenly court of angels expands the coupling of Middle-Platonic masculine (or neuter) principles of unity and feminine principles of diversity into a system of syzygies. Christian themes are present as well, particularly in the anointing of the Self-Generated, but they do not play as architectonic a role in the very structure of the heavenly world as Middle-Platonic and Jewish elements do."

IV. An Anticipatory Sketch of the Ontology of the Sethian Treatises

In all the Sethian treatises, the ontology, or doctrine of the levels of being or reality from the primal principle of all things down to the level of gross matter, is hierarchical. The major feature of this ontology is its dualism, since all of reality is distributed into two major realms, a transcendent realm of stable being and a lower, unstable realm of becoming characteristic of the ordinary world of everyday human experience. The instability of the lower realm is caused by a pre-existent, unformed matter whose existence is mostly presupposed; with the exception of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *Zostrianos*, its origin is generally left undescribed. As in the *Apocryphon of John*, many Sethian treatises locate at the summit of the hierarchy a supreme triad of Father, Mother and Child. The members of this triad are the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, and the divine Autogenes. The Invisible Spirit seems to transcend even the realm of being itself, which properly begins with Barbelo as his projected self-reflection. The Child is self-generated (αὐτογενής) from Barbelo either spontaneously from a spark of the Father's light, and is responsible for the ordering of the remainder of the transcendent realm, which is structured around the Four Luminaries and their associated aeons. The realm of becoming below this usually originates from Sophia's attempt to instantiate her own contemplation of the Invisible Spirit all by herself and without its permission; in many accounts, this act produces her misshapen offspring the Archon as the maker of the phenomenal world.

Within the Sethian corpus, for reasons that will become obvious, one is justified in speaking of a specific sub-group of texts, the "Platonizing" Sethian treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*. What is most striking about these treatises is that they introduce into Sethian literature an entirely new fund of metaphysical conceptuality that draws heavily on the technical terminology of Platonic philosophy. In them, the ontological structure of the transcendental world becomes highly articulated by means of various triadic arrangements that remind one of the metaphysics of the Neoplatonist philosophers in the third century.

The highest ontological level is beyond being altogether, in the manner of the non-being One of Plato's *Parmenides*, or the supreme One of

Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic speculation. The Sethian name for this supreme principle is the Invisible Spirit, characterized by non-being existence, silence and stillness; it is not an existing thing and is completely unknowable (XI 62,23-64,14; cf. also the *Apocryphon of John* II 2,26-3,36).

The second ontological level is that of determinate being, occupied by the Aeon of Barbelo, the First Thought or Mind of the Invisible Spirit, characterized as a non-discriminating, incorporeal, [timeless] knowledge (XI 51,10-11). While the *Apocryphon of John* closely associates Barbelo with her three attributes Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility, and Eternal Life, the Platonizing treatises actually subdivide the Barbelo Aeon into three levels which correspond to aspects of the Plotinian hypostases of Intellect and Soul: 1) the domain of "the authentic existents" (the Platonic intelligibles or ideas, the universal archetypes of everything) presided over by Kalyptos (the "Hidden One," a sort of contemplated intellectual principle rather like the Plotinian Intellect); 2) the domain of "those who are unified," a domain of multiple intellects presided over by Protophanes, "First appearing one" (a sort of contemplating intellect rather like the "second God" of Numenius; see Chapter 9 thereon), a "many in one" as the union of thinking with all the objects—archetypal forms and souls—that it thinks, not separately and sequentially, but always simultaneously; and 3) the domain of the "individuals" (differentiated, individual forms and souls) presided over by Autogenes (the "Self-begotten One," a sort of "demiurgical" intellect who operates on the realm of Nature below, rather like Numenius' "third God"). As their names reveal, they also represent three phases in the unfolding of determinate being within the Barbelo Aeon: initial latency or potential existence (the hidden Kalyptos), initial manifestation (Protophanes), and determinate, self-generated (Autogenes) instantiation.

The third ontological level is that of animated being, i.e., disincarnate souls. In the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, this realm seems to be that of the Four Luminaries Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, and Eleleth that contain the antediluvian Adam, Seth, and Seed of Seth, as well as morally repentant souls. While *Allogenes* seems to place souls in the third level of the Barbelo Aeon together with Autogenes and another savior figure called the Triple Male Child, *Zostrianos*, *Marsanes*, and the *Untitled* text of *Codex Bruce* locate this psychic realm below the Barbelo Aeon as the Self-generated Aeons, which contains the Four Luminaries, Adamas, Seth and his seed, and various other figures including self-generated souls.

The Aeon of Barbelo is the emanative product of the three-stage self-unfolding of the inner potency of the supreme Invisible Spirit. While the *Apocryphon of John* depicts the emergence of Barbelo as an act of the Invisible Spirit's mental self-reflection, *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* portray it in a manner typical of Neoplatonic metaphysics, as a three-phase self-unfolding through successive modalities of the Invisible Spirit's "Triple Power" (Existence, Vitality, and Mentality) to form the Aeon of Barbelo. According to *Allogenes*, just as the Barbelo aeon itself becomes a substantially existing aeon who can know herself because she knows her source (the Invisible Spirit), so also each level of being within the Aeon of Barbelo comes into being by knowing both itself and its originating principle. In typical Neoplatonic fashion, each successively lower being emanates from its immediate prior and achieves substantial reality by a contemplative reversion upon its suprajacent source. The chain of being is created and bound together by acts of vision and knowledge.

The fourth ontological level, Nature, is the physical realm of embodied existence. While many Sethian treatises either presuppose or offer a detailed account of its production through the fall of Sophia, this realm appears to hold no interest for the authors of *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth*, but is rather more highly developed in *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*, who credit it with various sublevels in descending order: the Repentance (μετάνοια), the Sojourn (παροίκησις), the Aeonic Copies (ἀντίτυποι), the atmospheric realm, the thirteen aeons ruled by the Archon, the earth, and the realm of pure matter.

V. Literary Genre of the Sethian Treatises

Some of the Nag Hammadi Sethian treatises apply a literary characterization to themselves. Thus, the *Apocryphon of John* designates itself as "the teaching of the savior and revelation of the mysteries and things hidden in silence ... taught to John his disciple." The *Hypostasis of the Archons* designates itself as a response to the question about the nature of the archontic rulers of this world. The *Gospel of the Egyptians*, whose original and proper title is *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, claims to be the holy book written by Seth and deposited on Mt. Char-

axio[26] in order that it may appear at the end of time and reveal the incorruptible holy race of Seth, their associates, and the supreme godhead of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo and their only-begotten Son. The *Three Steles of Seth* presents itself as Dositheus' revelation of three steles primordially inscribed by Seth, father of the unshakable race. *Allogenes* describes itself as "the seal of all the books of Allogenes," which Allogenes addressed to his son Messos and deposited on a mountain for posterity. Nevertheless, contemporary scholarship has classified these treatises by literary type in accordance with their presumed religious function:[27] apocalypse, testament, didactic treatise, revelation discourse and dialogue, self-predicatory aretalogy, liturgical manual, and ritual etiology.

The bulk of them are revelation discourses that narrate visions of the structure of the heavenly realm and the course cosmic history from the beginning to the present. The *Apocalypse of Adam*, despite its title, is actually a deathbed testament of Adam to his son Seth in which he reveals the content of a dream vision in which he was instructed by three heavenly men concerning the fortunes of Eve and himself, his son Seth and Seth's offspring in the contest between the evil creator god Saklas and the beings of a higher world who will rescue the seed of Seth. *Melchizedek* likewise contains the biblical high priest Melchizedek's report of revelations imparted to him by the angelic "receiver" Gamaliel and certain "brethren" (perhaps the primordial offspring of Seth) concerning future events that include the coming of the suffering, dying and rising savior Jesus Christ; like the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, it includes a lengthy (high priestly) doxology in honor of the denizens of the aeonic world spoken by Melchizedek as he receives baptism "in the living, holy [names] and waters."

26. Charaxio (III 68,13) might mean something like "mountain (Heb. הַר) of the worthy" (Gk. ἀξιῶν, i.e. "those who are worthy," namely the Sethians), where Seth put the treatise, and upon which the sun cannot rise (i.e. in the southern hemisphere.; cf. Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes* 1.68). A Charaxus is also mentioned by Ovid at *Metamorphoses* XII.212 as a Lapith and at *Heroides* XV.117 as a brother of Sappho.

27. See H.-M. SCHENKE, "Gnostic Sethianism," 597-602, and the introductions to the translations of the respective texts cited above, n. 5. See also, F. T. FALLON, "The Gnostic Apocalypses" in "Apocalypse. The Morphology of a Genre," ed. J. J. Collins; *Semeia* 14 (1979), 123-158.

In contrast to these two revelation discourses in which knowledge of the future course of history is communicated to the lower realm, we also find three revelation discourses which relate for the benefit of a group of similarly adept initiates the paradigmatic experience of a gnostic visionary who himself achieves enlightenment through an ecstatic ascent through the divine world. *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, and *Marsanes* each feature a visionary figure who undergoes a contemplative ascent involving visions of the divine world and its various levels of being followed by a subsequent descent and transmission of these visions in written form for those who in the future would achieve a similar ascent. Except for *Marsanes*, which lacks a narrative framework (but nevertheless contains some evidence of cosmic eschatology), one may regard them as apocalypses of the heavenly ascent variety. So also, if admitted to the corpus of Sethian texts, the short piece *Hypsiphrone* appears to have been a short apocalypse, presenting itself as "the book [of visions] which were seen [by Hypsi]phrone, and they [are revealed] in the place of [her] virginity."

One finds also two plainly didactic treatises, both having apparently undergone a secondary Christian redaction: The *Hypostasis of the Archons* contains an esoteric mythological interpretation of Genesis 1-9 in terms of the struggle between the spiritual rulers (*archons*) of this world and the exalted powers of the supreme deity over the fate of the divine image incarnated in Adam and his descendants; it concludes with a revelation dialogue between Eve's daughter Norea and the great angel Eleleth concerning the origin and end of these ruling Archons. The *Apocryphon of John*, as we have already noted, is cast as a revelation dialogue between John son of Zebedee and the risen Jesus; he reveals the unknowable deity and the divine world which emanated from him, the creative activity of the divine wisdom resulting in the birth of the world creator who fabricates the earthly Adam, as well as the subsequent history of the attempts of the denizens of the divine world to awaken the divine spirit in Adam, Seth and the seed of Seth, which is assured of its ultimate salvation.

While these two didactic treatises are primarily concerned with mythological theogony, cosmogony, anthropogony and a history of salvation governed by the intervention of divine saviors, two other treatises are devoted to Sethian ritual practice. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* explains the origin of Sethian baptism and the figures invoked and

praised in the course of the ritual by means of a mythological theogony, cosmogony and history of salvation similar to the *Apocryphon of John*. But the weight of the text seems to fall on a standard doxology punctuating each major episode of the theogony,[28] and a concluding mystical prayer celebrating the reception of the baptism of the Five Seals. While the *Gospel of the Egyptians* has undergone Christian redaction, the *Three Steles of Seth* is a non-Christian treatise in which the emphasis is again on prayer, for here Seth is represented as originating and transmitting to his posterity a set of three doxological prayers to be used during a community ritual; each prayer applies to a separate stage of an ecstatic ascent through the three highest levels of the divine world as portrayed in *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*. Indeed, it seems that here, the theogony functions as an etiology explaining the significance of the rather traditional-sounding enumerations of beings named in the doxologies and prayers, whereas in *Melchizedek* (IX 5,11-6,10; 16,11-18,7) the significance of the beings invoked in the two similar-sounding doxologies uttered by Melchizedek are not so explained.

Another treatise, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, takes the form of a first-person aretalogy or recitation of the deeds and attributes of Protennoia, the First Thought of the Sethian supreme deity. Speaking in the first person, she recites her attributes and saving initiatives in three separate compositions related respectively to her establishing heavenly dwellings for her fallen spirit trapped in mankind, her destruction of the power of the hostile spiritual rulers of the world, and her final saving descent as the Logos in the guise of Christ. If one includes *Thunder* in the Sethian dossier of texts, then one must add another such aretalogy consisting of diatribic self-predications in the form of paradoxical riddles spoken by another female savior figure rather like Sophia or Protennoia, perhaps this time speaking in the guise of the "fleshly Eve after her separation from the masculine half of the Adam androgyne."[29] A small sample of

28. IV 59,13-29; III 49,22-50,17; 53,12-54,11; 55,16-56,3; 61,23-62,13.

29. B. LAYTON, "The Riddle of the Thunder (NHC VI,2)," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 37-54 hypothesizes *Thunder* to be an offshoot (along with certain materials in *the Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World* [NHC II,5]) of a certain *Gospel of Eve* cited by Epiphanius (*Panarion* 26.2.6), a hypothesis more recently called into question by P.-H. POIRIER, *Le Tonnerre, Intellect Parfait* (NH VI, 2), (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 22; Québec and Louvain-Paris: Les Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 1995), 149-152.

such riddles may be found concerning the spiritual Eve in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (II 89,14-17), where Adam exclaims "It is you who have given me life; you will be called 'Mother of the living,' for it is she who is my mother; it is she who is the physician, and the wife, and she who has given birth."

Finally, the short piece *Thought of Norea* is an ode to Norea, wife-sister of Seth, conceived as a manifestation of Sophia, the "fallen" divine wisdom, who will be restored along with her spiritual progeny into the divine world by the very aeons from which she once departed.

VI. SUMMARY OF MAIN DOCTRINAL AND LITERARY FEATURES

We have now sketched out a representative outline of the Sethian theogony, cosmogony, anthropogony and the account of the origin of the evils that plague human existence, as well as a representative soteriology that explains how humanity will be extricated from their defective situation in a faulted world and reunited with their ultimate point of origin in the divine world. This grand myth is either presupposed in certain treatises or explicitly spelled out in others, often with variations. Such variation is also to be seen in the sheer variety of literary genres represented by the treatises, such as apocalypse, testament, didactic treatise, revelation dialogue, self-predicatory aretalogy, liturgical manual, and ritual etiology.

It should also have become plain that the Sethian treatises divide themselves into two basic groups depending on the way salvific enlightenment is to be attained. One group of tractates (the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and perhaps the *Hypostasis of the Archons*) conceptualizes the means of salvation as a horizontal, temporally successive sequence of descents into this world by a heavenly savior, while another group (*Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*) conceptualizes the means of salvation as a vertical succession of mental states and assimilation to ever higher levels of being on the part of the Gnostic himself. In the first group of treatises, the salvational process is instigated by the Mother of the Sethian trinity, often called Barbelo, while the mediator of salvation is usually a male figure who appears in

various guises, such as the Logos, or Autogenes Christ or Seth, and the instrument of salvation is frequently the baptismal rite called the Five Seals. In the second group, the possibility of enlightenment is revealed in the exemplary experience of various figures, Zostrianos, Allogenes or Marsanes who illustrate a contemplative technique that is expected to be worked out by the individual gnostic either alone or in concert with other similarly instructed adepts.

In anticipation of a fuller treatment in Chapter 12, we have also summarized the ontology, or doctrine of the levels of being, employed in *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*. It is basically a distinctively Platonic metaphysical elaboration upon the traditional divine triad of Father, Mother, and Son, but as we shall see, one in which the concept of a supreme trinity is jettisoned altogether. The ontology is hierarchical, articulated into triadic sub-structures, such as the Triple Powered One of the Invisible Spirit as the means by which the Aeon of Barbelo originates. In turn, the Aeon of Barbelo is also tripartitioned into sub-levels called Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes. As we shall see, these treatises show little trace of the radically dualistic opposition between the spiritual and material realms evident in other Sethian treatises; they in fact presuppose that the natural realm is worthy of ultimate preservation.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERDEPENDENCIES AMONG THE SETHIAN TREATISES

I. Thematic Interdependencies

The previous chapter has attempted to identify some of the common doctrines and mythologumena that are characteristic of the Sethian treatises as a whole, although there are significant differences among them, particularly in their depiction of the means by which salvation is attained. One may therefore suspect that these commonalties are not merely accidental products of individual authorial expression, but in fact result from the conscious dependence of one Sethian author upon another, or, lacking that, at least upon well-known common traditions. We now proceed to an investigation of each individual text in an effort to delineate the literary relationships between them, with a view toward constructing a history of the development of the movement dubbed "Sethian Gnosticism." In so doing, it is convenient to divide the treatises into the two groups delineated according to soteriological pattern in the preceding chapter, treating first treatises belonging to the "descent" pattern, and then those of the "ascent" pattern.

A. Treatises Employing the Descent Pattern

1. The Apocryphon of John

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *Apocryphon of John* contains a theogony and cosmogony extremely similar to the "Barbeloite" doctrine outlined by Irenaeus of Lyons in his work *Against the Heresies* (*Adversus Haereses* I.29), written around 175-180 CE. Since Irenaeus does not report the anthropogony and the history of salvation based on the Sethian interpretation of Gen 1-9, nor evince any trace of the Christian dialogical frame-story of the *Apocryphon of John*, it is usually assumed that he did not possess a copy of our extant versions of the *Apocryphon of John*. Therefore one must assume that Irenaeus had access to a version of its theogonical and cosmogonical sections that was produced before 150 CE.

The succeeding chapter of Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* I.30,1-10), which outlines a gnostic myth that Irenaeus attributes to certain "Ophites," but which Theodoret of Cyrrhus' Greek copy of Irenaeus' summary of Ophite doctrine (*Haereticarum fabularum compendium* I.13) attributes to Sethians, also bears a number of features reminiscent of Sethian ones: 1) the name "First Man" for the high deity, 2) a figure called the Son of Man, 3) a story of the "fall" of Sophia, who 4) creates Yaldabaoth and six angels whose names are the same as those in the *Apocryphon of John*, 5) the familiar story of Yaldabaoth's boasting in his sole deity and the heavenly response thereto, and 7) the creation of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Seth and Norea. Certain distinctly Sethian features are missing, however, such as the elevation of the seed of Seth, and the figures of the divine Adamas, and Autogenes and his Four Luminaries, features which it seems that Irenaeus would surely have described had his source employed the anthropogony and history of salvation appearing in the extant versions of the *Apocryphon of John*.

According to Frederik Wisse, one of the editors of the standard synopsis of the *Apocryphon of John*,[1] all four manuscripts (Nag Ḥammadi Codices II, III, and IV, and the Berlin Gnostic Codex) of the *Apocryphon* are copies of independent translations into Sahidic Coptic from earlier Greek exemplars, one a shorter and the other a longer version (both now lost).[2] The versions in Codices II and IV are independent Coptic recensions of a previous Coptic translation of the original longer Greek version, and the shorter versions contained in Codex III and the Berlin Codex are independent translations of a single Greek exemplar of the shorter version. Aside from the question of the relationship of these two or three recensions of the *Apocryphon of John* to the Barbeloite

1. *Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2*, ed. M. Waldstein and F. Wisse (Leiden, New York, and Köln: E. J. Brill, 1995); F. WISSE, "After the *Synopsis*: Prospects and Problems in Establishing a Critical Text of the *Apocryphon of John* and Defining its Historical Location," pages 138-153 and K. L. KING, "Approaching the Variants of the *Apocryphon of John*," pages 105-137 in J. D. Turner and A. McGuire, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 44. Leiden, New York, & Köln: E. J. Brill, 1997).

2. F. WISSE, "The Apocryphon of John," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. D. N. Freedman *et al.* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3.899: "All four copies of *Ap. John* are written in Sahidic with IV,1 conforming more closely to the standardized spelling of this Upper Egyptian dialect."

material summarized by Irenaeus, there is also the question of the relative priority among all these versions of the underlying myth: not only Irenaeus' account, but also that of both the two longer (II and IV) and two shorter versions (III and BG) of the *Apocryphon of John*. At present this issue has not been decided,[3] although it is obvious that even the material common to both the longer and shorter versions represents a text that has undergone substantial redaction and incorporated a number of separate sources such as the introductory negative theology (II 3,17-33), an excerpt from a "Book of Zoroaster" containing a lengthy melothesia (an account of the limb-by-limb construction of Adam's physical body by 365 angelic powers, II 15,27-19,10), and a short dialogical treatise on the salvation of various sorts of souls (BG 64,14-71,2; II 25,16-27,30).

The longer versions differ from the shorter ones principally in their inclusion of the long citation from the Book of Zoroaster and a hymnic monologue spoken by Pronoia as a conclusion for the entire work (II 30,11-31,25). While much of the material found in the *Apocryphon of John*—arguably the earliest complete version of the "Sethian myth"—is echoed in other Sethian treatises, the concluding Pronoia monologue seems actually to have served as the inspiration for the composition of an entire Sethian treatise, namely the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.

The Pronoia monologue concluding both longer versions of the *Apocryphon of John* is a hymnic composition of three stanzas in the first person singular self-predicatory style ("I am" = Greek ἐγώ εἰμι) found

3. Common opinion has held the longer version to be an expansion of the shorter version. On the basis of the frequency of Greek words, R. Kasser suggested the relative priority of the shorter version in Codex III, followed by the two longer versions in Codices II and IV, the latest of the versions being the shorter version in the Berlin Codex. Cf. R. KASSER, "Bibliothèque Gnostique V: Livre secret de Jean," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 14 (1964), 140-170; 15 (1965), 129-155; 16 (1966), 179-181; 17 (1967), 1-30. M. TARDIEU (*Écrits gnostiques: Codex de Berlin* [Sources gnostiques et manichéennes 1; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1984], 38-45) suggests that Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29 and the parallel material in the *Apocryphon of John* descend from a common source (π) combining Chaldaean astrology and Platonic metaphysics (found in NHC II 2,23-3,36; 4,10-5,32; 6,2-9,11; 9,25-35; 10,19-11,15; 11,22-35; 12,10-13,5; and 15,13-19,15 [=the Book of Zoroaster]), which was then combined with the triple-descent hymnic material based on the Johannine prologue to produce a common source on which all versions of the *Apocryphon of John* depend, to be dated around 170 CE; and that no relative chronological ordering of the versions can be clearly discerned, since they all bear evidence of redaction.

in first-person aretalogies or recitations of the powers and deeds of a divinity or hero, reminiscent of the Hellenistic/Graeco-Roman aretalogies of Isis or to the aretalogical Wisdom poem found in the eighth chapter of Proverbs. Each stanza narrates a separate saving descent of Pronoia, probably to be identified with Ennoia/Pronoia/Barbelo, the merciful Mother-Father of the main narrative, despite the fact that the first-person style of the narrative frame story, which has Jesus speaking this monologue to John, has the effect of identifying him as Pronoia, even though the main body of the *Apocryphon* clearly identifies Jesus with Pronoia's Autogenes son.

In the Pronoia monologue, Pronoia descends twice into the lower world and shakes the foundations of chaos, but then in a third descent comes into the prison, said to be the body, awakens the soul from its corporeal forgetfulness, and raises it into the light by sealing it with the luminous water of the Five Seals.[4] This is the only direct reference to the Sethian baptismal rite of the Five Seals in the *Apocryphon of John*, which suggests that the conferral of this rite was not a feature of the *Apocryphon*'s original myth. Elsewhere, the Five Seals are mentioned only in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the untitled text (ch. 4, as five seals contained in the "third Father") of the Bruce Codex, and developed significantly in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.[5] Since the passage is not present in the shorter versions of the *Apocryphon of John* or in Irenaeus' digest of its theogony and cosmogony, it is likely that it was originally entirely independent of the earliest versions of the *Apocryphon of John*. The longer version's addition of the Pronoia monologue had the effect of recapitulating Pronoia/Barbelo's three basic salvific visitations from the higher to the lower world narrated in the main body of the *Apocryphon of John* as salvific deeds of Christ himself. It was he, not Pronoia, who initiated 1) the downward projection of the image of the First Man, 2) the sending of the spiritual Eve as Adam's enlightener and mother of the savior Seth, and 3) his own final advent into the world to enlighten

4. A possibility first noted by G. W. MacRae, "Sleep and Awakening in Gnostic Texts," in *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13-18 Aprile 1966* (ed. U. Bianchi; Supplements to Numen 12; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 496-507.

5. See the *Apocryphon of John* II 31,24; IV 49,4; the *Gospel of the Egyptians* IV 56,25; 58,6; 58,27-28; 59,27-28; 66,25-26; 74,16; 78,4-5; III 55,12; 63,3; 66,3; the Bruce *Untitled* treatise 232,10 [Schmidt-MacDermot]; and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 48,31; 49,27-28; 47,29; 50, 9-10.

the contemporary Sethians by revealing to John the Sethian sacred history told in the main body of the work.

2. *The* Trimorphic Protennoia

The *Apocryphon of John* conceives the tripartite history of redemption as merely initiated by the transcendent Mother-Father Barbelo/Pronoia but executed in the earthly realm below by various agents: her own Voice that revealed the image of the First Human, perhaps her Son the Autogenes together with the Four Luminaries, then the Epinoia of Light who appears as the spiritual Eve, and finally the Christ of the frame story. But the original speaker of the concluding Pronoia monologue was certainly identical with the Barbelo of the first part of the *Apocryphon*, and it is also clearly this same figure who is featured in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, which prefers to call her Protennoia, the "First Thought" of the supreme Invisible Spirit.

In the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, she manifests herself directly in the lower world in three revelatory modes of increasing articulateness. As a Father, the masculine Voice of the Thought, she first weakens the grip of the infernal powers on her fallen members. Second, as Mother, the Speech of the Thought, she inaugurates the shift of the ages, and overturns the uncomprehending infernal and celestial powers of the Archigenetor and gives shape to her members. Third, as Son, the Word of the Thought, she replaces the darkened psychic and somatic thought of her members with divine light (i.e. enlightenment) by conferring upon them the baptismal ascent ritual of the Five Seals, and bears Jesus aloft from the cross into the dwelling places of his Father. The extant version of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* consists of three separate sub-treatises,[6] each depicting a successive descent of the divine First Thought, but further analysis detects a more complex structure that reveals a multistage history of composition and redaction.[7]

The *Trimorphic Protennoia* sustains obvious relationships to other Sethian literature. In its development of the Father-Mother-Child triad as applied to Protennoia-Barbelo, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* draws on the triple descent and cosmological materials found also in the *Apocryphon of John*. The *Trimorphic Protennoia*'s three-fold aretalogical structure

6. Entitled "The Discourse of Protennoia: [One]," "[On] Fate: [Two]," and "The Discourse of the Appearance: Three."

7. See Chapter 4 on the chronology and redaction of the Sethian treatises.

and threefold descent of Protennoia culminating in her salvific gift of the Five Seals surely bears a close relationship to the similar first person self-predicatory monologue of Pronoia that concludes the *Apocryphon of John* (II 30,11-31,25), close enough to conjecture that the monologue is likely to have served as a model or direct source for the original composition of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.[8]

In contrast to all other Sethian treatises of the descent pattern, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*'s account of Sophia shares a distinctive feature in common with the *Gospel of the Egyptians*: the responsibility for her creative initiative does not fall upon her, but is instead transferred to the fourth Luminary Eleleth, who utters a boast, "I am King! Who is (the king) of Chaos and who is (the king) of the underworld?" (XIII 39,15-17), nearly identical to Eleleth's exhortation in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* "Let someone reign over the chaos and Hades" (III 56,24-25). Ironically, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*'s version of this boast is very similar to Yaldabaoth's boast of his sole divinity in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. Evidently, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* assigns the ultimate responsibility for the origin and activity of the world creator Yaldabaoth and his work not to Sophia, but to the fourth Luminary Eleleth. Nevertheless, the text (XIII 39,13-32) goes on to imply that Sophia is in fact Yaldabaoth's mother who "had descended" and from whom Yaldabaoth had stolen power. So as in other Sethian treatises, Sophia "falls," but in this act, she is ultimately blameless, only a victim of circumstance. Moreover, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* identifies the power that Yaldabaoth stole from Sophia with the Epinoia of light. According to both the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 35,12-18) and the *Apocryphon of John*, this Epinoia is Barbelo/Pronoia/Protennoia's earthly manifestation, who in the *Apocryphon* is sent to Adam as a correction for Sophia's deficiency![9] By identifying the Sophia who descended with the Epinoia, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* conceives Sophia/Epinoia as a "saved savior," at once source and object of her own saving power.

Having descended, Epinoia/Sophia appeals to Eleleth to restore her former rank (XIII 39,32-40,4) in much the same way as does Norea,

8. See discussion in Chapter 4.

9. The *Apocryphon of John* II 20,27-28. In fact, the longer version of the *Apocryphon* (II 9,25) introduces the story of Sophia's fall by calling her "the Sophia of Epinoia," while the other versions merely call her "our sister Sophia."

who in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* functions as the undefiled, virginal "helper" of Mankind (which is the function of the figure called the Epinoia of light in *the Apocryphon of John*). The treatises the *Thought of Norea* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons* likewise portray Norea as a Sophia figure. Like Sophia in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Apocryphon of John*, she cries out (or repents) to be restored to her place in the light so as to make up her deficiency, perhaps by the agency of the Four Luminaries or their ministers (Gamaliel, Gabriel, Abrasax and Samblo). The *Thought of Norea*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* seem to assume or stress the innocence of Epinoia/Sophia such that her restoration to the Light no longer requires repentance for a willful act performed without her consort, as is the case in *the Apocryphon of John*. Indeed, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* goes a step further than the *Trimorphic Protennoia* by attributing the origin of the archons Saklas and Nebruel to Gamaliel and Gabriel, the ministers of the two highest of the Four Luminaries, while Sophia's function is merely limited to producing the matter over which they rule! So also in the treatise *Zostrianos* (VIII 9,1-11,1) Sophia is the source of dark matter, but not of the creator Archon who shapes it. Unlike the Valentinian doctrine of Sophia's separation from her passions by Christ and the Savior (e.g., Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.4,1-5), in these treatises Sophia does not need separation from her blame because she is assigned none. In fact the *Gospel of the Egyptians* distinguishes between the "hylic Sophia cloud" and another figure called Repentance (Metanoia) who descended to the world as an image of the night, prays for the seed of Adam and Seth (and the seed of the Archon and authorities!), and will sow the seed of Seth into the aeons to make up the deficiency (III 59,9-60,2).

Finally, in terms of its stress upon the baptismal ascent ritual,[10] the *Trimorphic Protennoia* seems to sustain a close relationship especially to the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Zostrianos*, the *Apocryphon of John*, and, more distantly, to *Melchizedek* and perhaps *Marsanes* and even the *Apocalypse of Adam*. Owing to their fragmentary nature, it is difficult to see what role the Sethian baptismal ritual plays in *Melchizedek* and

10. See H.-M. SCHENKE, "Gnostic Sethianism," 602-607 and J.-M. SEVRIN, *Le dossier baptismal séthien. Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Études » 2; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1986), *passim*.

Marsanes. In *Marsanes*, "washing" is mentioned on page 55; pages 64-66 seem to narrate Marsanes' vision of certain angels, among whom is Gamaliel, who is "over [those] spirit(s)" and "guides" Marsanes somewhere to behold a scene of judgment in the vicinity of an "[everflowing fountain] of [the] living [water]," where the soul is "cleansed" and "sēaled" with the "celestial seal."

3. Melchizedek

In *Melchizedek*, Gamaliel, one of the traditional servants of the Sethians' Four Luminaries sent "to [rapture] the congregation of the children of Seth," appears to the high-priest Melchizedek to proclaim the coming of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the commander of the Four Luminaries, and who belongs to the race of the high priest of the most high God. In Gamaliel's speech to Melchizedek (IX 5,11-6,10) there is an invocation of prominent Sethian figures, Barbelo the Mother of the aeons, Doxomedon Dom[edon?] the first born of the aeons, "who belongs to the washings" (a figure also found in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* as a kind of aeonic container for the ogdoads of the Father, Mother and Child), the Four Luminaries, the Man of light Pigeradamas, and Mirocheirothetos, all invoked through Jesus Christ, Son of God. On pages 7-8 of *Melchizedek*, baptism is mentioned with what seems to be a distinction between "waters which are above," in which Melchizedek is to be baptized, and other "waters," perhaps those of ordinary Christian water baptism.[11]

In Melchizedek's response to Gamaliel (IX 14,16-18,7) he now recognizes that he is only "[the image of] the true High-Priest [of] God Most High" (IX 15,11-13), presumably since it has been revealed to him that the actual high priest, Jesus Christ, is yet to come. Thereupon, Melchizedek offers himself up as a sacrifice, and says he will pronounce his name as he "receives baptism [now] (and) forever among the living (and) holy [names], and in the [waters]." At this point he delivers an ascription of praise (IX 16,11-18,7) in the form of a *trisagion* to various

11. Cf. the phrase "[the waters] which are above" (IX 8,1) in the speech of Gamaliel. In the case of Melchizedek's speech, he says that he will pronounce his "name" as he "receives baptism," signifying the entrance of the baptizand into a special social or ontological class, and implying, though not necessarily entailing, that baptism is not self-administered (although no officiant is explicitly mentioned or alluded to).

figures, again including the holy Father Abel Baruch ("blessed Father-God"), perhaps Autogenes, the Mother Barbelo, Doxomedon, the Four Luminaries Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, and Eleleth (called commanders or commanders in chief), the Man of Light Pigeradamas, Mirocheirothetos, and Jesus Christ as commander-in-chief. The treatise concludes with another revelation that Gamaliel promised would come to Melchizedek, this time from the "[elect sons] of Adam [who are Abel], Enoch, [Noah]," and delivered by certain otherwise anonymous "brethren who belong to the generations of life" (IX 27,7-8), perhaps to be understood as representatives of the primordial seed of Seth dwelling in the aeons of the Four Luminaries, though the text yields no further clues concerning their identity.

Among the other Nag Hammadi Sethian treatises, only the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and *Zostrianos* witness both the figures Doxomedon ("lord of glory") and Mirothoe/Mirothea (perhaps "anointing goddess," μύρου + θεά), the mother of Adamas, to which Mirocheirothetos (perhaps meaning "anointed one," <* μυροχειροθετέω) is perhaps related as object to subject. Of course, Meirothea is to be found also in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where it is an epithet of Barbelo/Protennoia and in the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 119,12), where it is applied by Seth to his father Pigeradamas as a "Mirotheid" (Mirotheas, born from Mirothea), his "Mirotheos." These lists of beings probably derive from the traditional liturgies of the Sethian baptismal rite, which may also have included a pre- or post-baptismal anointing.

Melchizedek would strike one as a Christian meditation, similar to the NT letter to the Hebrews, upon the relation between Jesus Christ and the high priest Melchizedek, were it not for the fact that the two speeches contain an admixture of Sethian Gnostic terminology. It seems as if *Melchizedek* is a basically Christian work which has been Sethianized.[12]

4. Apocalypse of Adam

Sethian baptism also plays a prominent role in the *Apocalypse of Adam*. Like the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, it too exhibits signs of a redactional history. C. W. Hedrick has plausibly pointed out that the *Apocalypse of Adam* consists of two independent

12. Cf. B. A. PEARSON, trans. with S. Giverson, "Melchizedek," in *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Nag Hammadi Studies 15; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), esp. 229-250.

threads, "sources" A and B, which have been woven together along with editorial comments by a redactor.[13]

Source A contains a deathbed testament of Adam who relates to his son Seth the loss of his knowledge of God which he shared with Eve until they were split into two aeons, and were enslaved to the creator god who brought the flood and conflagration. The couple's fleshly seed is preserved in the offspring of Noah, who together with his sons Ham, Japheth and Shem, are regarded as sinful Sethites who have disobeyed their heritage and have made a pact to serve the evil creator Saklas, since they, like the angels of Gen 6:1-4, have lustfully cohabited with mortal women.[14] The result is the flood, from which Noah saves himself and his family in the ark, while certain "holy angels" elevate Seth's seed, the people of Gnosis, to safety. Yet among the offspring of Noah, who form twelve kingdoms that serve Saklas, there is a "righteous remnant" consisting of 400,000 of the sons of Ham and Japheth who, after the flood, defected from the Semites—apparently the seed of Shem are Jews who are completely condemned—and join with the elect, the true, undefiled seed of Seth. This defection angers Saklas, who determines to exterminate the elect through a great conflagration. While all the sons of Noah were saved from the flood, the elect, joined by the 400,000, will be saved from Saklas' second attempt to exterminate them—perhaps through the raining of fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah—by the ministers of the Four Luminaries Abrasax, Samblo and Gamaliel. The elect will live forever in the aeons (probably those of the Four Luminaries), but the rest of the offspring of Noah will continue to serve the creator and will surely die. At this point a third divine intervention is introduced, which contains material that seems to derive from a new source.

Hedrick's source B contains a dream vision revealed to Adam by three glorious men who narrate the third saving mission of an "illuminator" whose origin is unknown to the evil powers. Thirteen opinions of his origins, symbolized by thirteen "kingdoms," are rejected; in reality

13. C. W. HEDRICK, "The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1972), 581-590, and more fully, IDEM, *The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 46; Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1980). Source A: V 64,1-65,23; 66,12-67,12; 67,22-29; 69,1-76,6; 83,7-84,3; 85,19-22.32; Source B: V 65,24-66,12; 67, 12-21; 76,8-83,4.

14. The interpretation of STROUMSA, *Another Seed*, 82-103.

he comes from a great aeon to enlighten his elect. From the point of view of the redactor, the illuminator does not receive nourishment, glory, and power in the beyond and then "come (down) to the water," which the redactor regards as polluted and chaotic, but rather remains above in the light where he resides with the three imperishable illuminators Yesseus, Mazareus, Yessedekeus, the Living Water.[15] At some point, angelic beings will bring the truth to the Sethians below in a way independent of the written word of the evil creator, a truth that is apparently communicated by a holy baptism through "logos-begotten" illuminators.

There is thus a distinction between the holy baptism with Living Water and a baptism practiced by the servants of the creator who have polluted the water of life. A similar distinction between a polluted earthly baptism and an undefiled celestial baptism is apparently made in *Melchizedek* (IX 7,4-9,2), *Zostrianos* (VIII 131,2-10), and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 67,22-26, esp. IV 80,9-13). This agrees with the recurrent emphasis in the latter two works and in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* on the "unpolluted" or "undefiled" waters, called the "spring (i.e., source) of truth."

Finally, the *Apocalypse of Adam* shares with the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (and, as will be noted, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*), the motif of the triple descent of the redeemer (the Illuminator, Protennoia and Seth respectively) culminating in the delivery of a saving baptism. On the other hand, it knows nothing of a rite explicitly called the Five Seals, nor of the "Barbeloite" doctrine of the divine Father, Mother, and Son triad as it occurs in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and *Melchizedek*.

5. *The* Gospel of the Egyptians

Although the original and proper title of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* is *The Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, to avoid confusion, I shall refer to this work throughout as the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, following modern—but incorrect—scholarly convention. As suggested by Schenke, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* can "be understood as the mythological

15. Elsewhere in Sethian treatises, Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus is a compound name, a barbarization of the name of Jesus in which one is baptized in "living water."

justification of a well-defined ritual of baptism including the invocations that must be performed therein."[16] He observes that the emphasis of this text falls on its final part (III 63,4-68,1 cf. IV 74,17-80,15). At this point in the text, the three advents (παρουσίαι) of Seth are summarized, namely his descent at the flood, at the conflagration (of Sodom and Gomorrah), and at the judgment of the archons, to save his seed ("saints") who have gone astray in the world, a scheme of three descents similar to those of the Illuminator in the *Apocalypse of Adam*. It is on his third descent that Seth is said to descend in a Logos-begotten body prepared for himself by the "virgin" (probably Barbelo), put on Jesus, and defeat the powers of the thirteen aeons.[17]

This is the same pattern found in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where the Logos-aspect of Protennoia descends through the levels of the various powers, at each level disguising itself in the garments and form of each one, finally putting on Jesus and bearing him and Protennoia's "seed" aloft into the holy light. While the *Trimorphic Protennoia* identifies this Logos with the perfect Son, the Christ (XIII 37,3-8), the god who was begotten (i.e., Autogenes; cf. XIII 37,20-39,13), the *Gospel of the Egyptians* identifies "the great Christ" with the archetypal Seth, the Triple Male Child "Telmaêl Telmaêl Hêli Hêli Machar Machar Seth," and distinguishes him from the lower figure of Autogenes, who is always mentioned in association with the Logos and the "incorruptible man Adamas." Furthermore, both the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* equate the descent of the Logos upon the earthly figure of Jesus with the bestowal of the baptismal rite of the Five Seals. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* identifies the living water in which one is baptized with Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus (a barbarized version of the name of Jesus), while the *Trimorphic Protennoia* identifies it with the Voice/Father aspect of Protennoia, which her Logos/Child aspect in turn pours out on her members below, stripping them of the corporeal and psychic thought and replacing it with radiant light.

While the *Trimorphic Protennoia*—in which the figure of Jesus plays no specific redemptive role—identifies this enlightenment merely with undergoing the rite of the Five Seals, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* attributes several functions to Seth's descent as a Logos-begotten body upon

16. SCHENKE, "Gnostic Sethianism," 600.

17. III 63,4-64,9. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, those bearing the designation "virgin[al]" are the Great Invisible Spirit, Barbelo[n], Youel, and Plesithea.

Jesus: he is the instrument of a holy baptism, which involves the "killing" (ϩⲱⲧⲃ, IV 75,3; III 63,9 has ϩⲱⲧⲛ, "reconciliation") of the world, the begetting of the saints through invisible secret symbols, a renouncing of the world and the god of the thirteen aeons as well as the "nailing" of their powers, and a gathering of the saints. In III 65,26-66,8 it is said that through the incorruptible man Poimael, those "who are worthy of (the) invocation, the (baptism of) the renunciations of the Five Seals in the spring-baptism will know their receivers," identified earlier as the ministers of the Four Luminaries, Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo and Abrasax.[18] In the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 48,26-31), the ministers of the Four Luminaries (Gamaliel, [...]nen and Samblo) rapture the baptizand into the Light. Thus in both these treatises, there are a series of references to certain gestures and verbal performances capable of ritual enactment: renunciation, stripping, invocation and naming of holy powers, doxological prayer to the living water, anointing, enthronement, investiture, baptismal immersion, and certain other manual gestures, such as extending the arms in a circle. Whether any of these acts, and if so, which ones, comprise the Five Seals is difficult to tell; certainly all these were frequently part of the baptismal rite in the wider church as well.

As in the case of the *Apocalypse of Adam* and *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* portray salvation as the culmination of a series of three descents of a heavenly being to earth. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* ascribe the final act of salvation to the third descent of Seth or Pro-

18. Earlier in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 52,3-53,9) these ministers, ranked in the same order, are listed as members of the aeons of the Four Luminaries Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth, and they are joined by two series of hypostatized virtues: as feminine consorts for the Four Luminaries to complete the ogdoad of Autogenes: Charis, Thelesis, Synesis, Phronesis (similar to and probably derived from the systems of the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.29), and to complete a fifth ogdoad, four consorts for the four ministers, Mneme, Agape, Eirene and (Aionia) Zoe (probably derived from the *Apocryphon of John* (II, 5,26-30; 6,7; 7,12), where Aionia Zôê may be an error for ἔννοια and ζωή, regarded in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* as feminine consorts for the four ministers). The contents of the second and third ogdoads of the Mother and Child are unspecified, while that of the Father (III 42,5-11) contains thought, word, incorruption, eternal [life], will, mind, and foreknowledge, only seven items, lacking the figure of Christ; the complete ogdoad occurs in Irenaeus' (*Adv. Haer.* 1.29) version of the system underlying the *Apocryphon of John*.

tennoia in the form of the Logos who, in the former work, puts on Jesus, or in the latter, rescues him from the cross. In each case this descent is associated with the bestowal of a ritual of baptismal ascent known as the Five Seals in which the bodily and psychic garment of the spirit is replaced with light and immortal incorruptibility. The eschatological role of Jesus in these two texts clearly reflects Christian influence, positive to be sure in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, but of an extremely polemical sort in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, since there, rather than being the savior, Jesus becomes the one saved.

6. *The* Hypostasis of the Archons

The triple descent of the revealer also informs the basic soteriological pattern in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, whose first part is a Sethian rewriting of Genesis 2-9 that draws not only on various Jewish exegetical traditions, but also on an interpretation of Genesis 2 similar to Paul's, for example in 1 Cor 15:35-50 (on the two Adams and the physical versus spiritual body). The initial descent is Incorruptibility's rebuke of the chief authority Samael followed by her downward gaze by which she projects below the divine image which the authorities capture into an earthly, but inert, form (II 86,27-87,33). The second act opens with the descent of the Spirit "from the Adamantine" land (the divine realm) to ensoul the inert Adam by the insufflation of spiritual substance (II 88, 10-15; cf. 1 Cor 15:43-47). When the Authorities put Adam to sleep and extract Eve from his rib, the removal of spiritual substance leaves him again merely psychic, whereupon the spiritual Eve appears in the form of the snake and enlightens the earthly Adam and Eve by causing them to eat of the tree of knowledge, thus raising them from the psychic to the spiritual level (II 89,4-90,14; cf. Prov 1:22-26, 29; 3:18-19; 4:13; 1 Cor 15:43-48). After the birth of Cain, Abel, Seth, and Norea,[19] and

19. On Norea see B. A. PEARSON, "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature," *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm, August 20-25, 1973*, ed. G. Widengren (Kungl. Vitterhets Historie ock Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, Filologisk-filosofiska serien, 17; Stockholm and Leiden: Almqvist & Wiksell and E. J. Brill, 1977), 143-152. Norea is the biblical Na'amah (Gen 4:22), the daughter of Cainite Lamech and sister of Tubal-Cain, and later taken to be the wife-sister of Seth. See Ps.-Philo, *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* 1.1: *Initium mundi. Adam genuit tres filios et unam filiam, Cain, Noba, Abel et Seth*; *Chronicles of Jerahmeel* 26.1: "Adam fathered three sons and three daughters: Cain and his twin, Qalmana, his wife, and Abel and his twin, Deborah his wife; and Seth and his twin,

the coming of the flood, the Archon tries to rape Norea for attempting to burn Noah's ark, whereupon the fourth Luminary Eleleth comes to her rescue. Teaching her about the nature of the archons, Eleleth predicts the third salvific descent in the form of the final appearance of a savior, the true man (perhaps Seth), who will anoint the "seed" (of Seth) with the unction of eternal life and restore it into the light (II 96,29-97,20; cf. 1 Cor 15:47-49).

Though using slightly different nomenclature, this is approximately the same triple descent pattern as occurs in the *Apocryphon of John*, although these descents are not specifically attributed to the Mother Barbelo, whose place is here generally occupied by Incorruptibility, which in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* is only a hypostatized attribute of Pronoia/Barbelo. Whereas the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* conceive the final act of salvation as the baptism of the Five Seals, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* seems to designate it as an anointing, an action which the former treatises associate only with the emergence of the third member of the primal triad, the divine Autogenes/Christ, who is "anointed (cf. χριστός, χρίσμα) with the goodness (-χρηστός) of the Invisible Spirit." It seems as if the *Hypostasis of the Archons* stands in the Sethian pattern of the salvific descent of wisdom, but knows nothing of the rite of the Five Seals, nor of the "Barbeloite" doctrine of the divine Father, Mother, and Son triad as spelled out in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and *Melchizedek*.

Noba', his wife"; according to *Zohar* I, 55a; III, 76b the Cainite Na'amah seduced the "sons of God" (Gen. 6:2 interpreted to mean angels) by her beauty; R. Abba b. Kahana, in *Midrash Genesis Rabba* on Gen. 4:22: "Na'amah was Noah's wife"; in NHC IX,*2*, *The Thought of Norea*, Norea cries out for help to the Four Luminaries and is ultimately translated to the heavenly Pleroma; *Orig. World* II 102, 7-10, "You will find the effects and male powers of these names discussed in the Archangelic Book of the Prophet Moses and the female names, in the first book of Noraia," and II 102, 23-25 "You will find the description of these things precisely stated in the first treatise of Oraia"; the Sethians (Ophians or Ophites) of Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30,9 hold that after the birth of Cain and Abel, Seth was generated after Norea, by the providence of Prunicos [i.e. Sophia]; the Sethians *apud* Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.5.2 "A certain Horaia they claim to be Seth's wife"; Nicolaitans *apud* Filastrius, Haer. 33.3: they venerate this Barbelo and a certain woman Nora; see Epiphanius' lengthy account of the Nicolaitans in *Panarion* 26.1.3-2.1.

7. The Thought of Norea

Norea's plea to the "God of the all" in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* constitutes her initial action in the *Thought of Norea*, where she invokes the divine triad of Father (Mind, Adamas), Mother (Ennoia) and Son (Mind; Logos, Autogenes). Just as in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* where the angel Eleleth comes to her aid, so also the *Thought of Norea* accords her the Four Luminaries as helpers who intercede for her with the Father of the All. Having entered a condition of deficiency, she will be allowed to find rest in the place of Epinoia with the divine Autogenes. Just as the Epinoia of Light in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Apocryphon of John*, so also Norea in the *Thought of Norea* is a symbolic equivalent of Sophia in the task of making up her deficiency. According to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*:

> **XIII 39** [32] Now when the Epinoia of the [Light] realized [33] that [he (Yaltabaoth)] had begged him (the Light), [34] for another [order, even though he was lower] than she, she said, [35] "Grant me another order so that you (Eleleth) may become for me [36] [a dwelling place lest I dwell] in disorder [37] [forever." And the order of the] entire house of **40** [1] glory [was agreed] upon her [2] word. A blessing was brought for [3] her and the higher order released it [4] to her.

In the *Thought of Norea*:

> **IX 27** [21] It is Norea who [cries out] [22] to them. They [heard], [23] (and) they received her into her place [24] forever. They gave it [25] to her in the Father of Nous, [26] Adamas, as well as the voice [27] of the Holy Ones, **28** [1] in order that she might rest [2] in the ineffable Epinoia.

B. Treatises Employing the Ascent Pattern

It now remains to treat those Sethian texts which employ the scheme of visionary ascent to enlightenment in preference to that of the threefold descent of a revealer into the world. For this purpose, the component of ascension or rapture into the light culminating in the baptismal rite of the Five Seals, with its associated *dramatis personae* functioning as various baptizers, purifiers, glorifiers, superintendents, guardians and rapturers, as well as the associated springs, gates, living waters, and so on, will be presupposed. Indeed the ascensional component in the baptismal rite is probably the predecessor of a practice of visionary ascent performed quite apart from the actual physical act of baptism. In the

texts to be considered, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*, not only is the experience of such an ascent developed into a specific technique of visionary ascent, but also a new metaphysical nomenclature for the ontological levels of the ascent is adopted from contemporary Platonic metaphysics. These texts are further distinguished by the apparent absence of certain prominent Sethian themes, such as the apocalyptic schematization of history according to the periodic descent of a divine revealer or redeemer. They exhibit a greatly attenuated interest in (*Zostrianos*) or even absence of (*Allogenes*, *Steles Seth*, *Marsanes*) a narrative of the cosmogony of this world including the downward inclination of Sophia and the origin and activity of her demiurgical offspring. They also lack any exegetical speculation on the Genesis story of the creation of mankind and his primeval history; only the names of Adam (Adamas, Pigeradamas) and Seth (Setheus, Seth Emacha Seth) remain, but as exclusively heavenly beings. Furthermore, these texts show no manifest evidence of Christianization or of concern with issues raised by Christianity. In these texts, Sethianism has become a form of mythological Platonism.

The Platonizing Sethian texts resort to the conceptuality of later religious Platonic metaphysics for identifying the traditional Sethian divine beings with various abstract levels of transcendent being. They commemorate the ecstatic ascent of a single exceptional individual such as Zostrianos (the alleged uncle or grandfather of Zoroaster), Allogenes ("one of another kind, race," a play on σπέρμα ἕτερον of Gen 4:25), Emmacha Seth, or Marsanes. Many of the traditional Sethian figures continue to appear: the Invisible Spirit and its Silence; the male virginal Barbelo and her three attributes (now completely renamed and redefined as aeons); the divine Autogenes (no longer understood as Barbelo's child); Adamas/Pigeradamas; the Triple-Male Child; and the child of the child Esephech (now spelled Ephesech); and certain feminine powers who appear to be lower doubles of Barbelo, such as Youel/Yoel and Meirothea.

The metaphysics of the Platonizing Sethian treatises is strikingly innovative: it is laid out on four ontological levels, positing a highest realm beyond even being itself, below which one finds an atemporal, intelligible realm of pure determinate being, followed by a psychic realm, characterized by time and motion, and finally a physical realm at the bottom of the scale. Furthermore, these treatises seem to have com-

pletely jettisoned the Father-Mother-Child nomenclature designating the supreme trinity familiar from earlier treatises in favor of an absolute monism that completely reconceptualizes the older triadic metaphysics. In this new metaphysics, rather than a single triad of supreme principles, two new triads are proposed.[20] The first of these is the Triple Powered One, a triad of abstract powers—usually named Existence, Vitality, and Mentality—by which the Invisible Spirit generates all further reality. The second is a triad of distinct ontological levels contained in the erstwhile Mother figure, Barbelo. From highest to lowest, these are: Kalyptos (the Hidden One), Protophanes (the First-Appearing one), and the divine Autogenes (the Self-begotten one). Under this new arrangement, Barbelo is no longer conceived as the feminine Mother of her Child Autogenes, but as the masculine "Aeon (ὁ αἰών) of Barbelo." As a result, the erstwhile Child-figure of the traditional Father-Mother-Child triad becomes merely the lowest of the three levels of the Barbelo Aeon, and—in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*—a new Child figure emerges, the Triple Male Child, a being who resides at various levels in the Barbelo Aeon and functions as a (non-descending) Savior.

At the lower periphery of the divine world are the Self-generated Aeons, presided over by the divine Autogenes. Souls that reside in the Self-generated Aeons are called (perfect) "individuals" who are assured of salvation by virtue of knowledgeably abiding in "the truth of the All." The Self-generated Aeons contain the Four Luminaries, as well as the vast majority of the divine beings traditionally associated with the Sethian baptismal rite.

The divine world contains all those beings that are either unbegotten or self-begotten. Below the Self-generated Aeons comes the realm of the generated cosmos, which *Allogenes* merely calls "Nature" (φύσις). In *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*, however, the realm extending from beneath the Aeon of Barbelo to the earth is expressly articulated into distinct levels, each populated with various kinds of souls and spiritual beings. According to *Zostrianos*, directly below the Aeon of Barbelo, one finds:

20. See J. H. Sieber, "An Introduction to the Tractate *Zostrianos* from Nag Hammadi," *Novum Testamentum* 15 (1973), 233-240, esp. 238; *idem*, "The Barbelo Aeon as Sophia in *Zostrianos* and Related Tractates," in *Rediscovery*, 788-795 and *idem*, "Introduction" to *Zostrianos* in *Nag Hammadi Codex VIII*, ed. J. H. Sieber (Nag Hammadi Studies 31; Leiden: Brill, 1991), 7-28.

1. the Repentance (*Metanoia*), containing the disembodied souls of those who sin yet repent,
2. the Sojourn (*Paroikesis*), containing disembodied souls who are not self-directed, but follow the ways of others,
3. the Aeonic Copies (*Antitypoi*), presumably the seven planets and the fixed stars as the original abode of disembodied souls,[21]
4. the atmospheric realm ("airy earth," *Ge Aerodios*), apparently the realm extending from the moon down to the level of the clouds or the earth itself, and finally
5. the corporeal realm below the moon, with its own thirteen aeons presided over by the Archon.

A similar hierarchy, omitting the domain of the Aeonic Copies and the atmospheric realm, is found in *Marsanes* (X 2,16-3,17), which calls all thirteen ontological levels from lowest to highest "seals."[22] As in *Zostrianos*, the aeonic hierarchy seems to be interpreted by baptismal terminology, a feature entirely missing in *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth*. The most complete list of these powers comes from the last page of the untitled text of the Bruce Codex (263,11-264,6 [Schmidt-MacDermot]):

> **LX** [29] He heard them and sent [30] discriminating [31] powers that know the structure of [32] the Hidden Aeons; he sent them [33] forth in accord with the

21. In some places these antitypes seem to be copies of the immediately suprajacent Self-generated Aeons, Metanoia, and Paroikesis, rather than to constitute a single level of their own. In *Zostrianos* (VIII 12,2-18), this level apparently consists of the souls of ordinary mortals who "cannot stand according to the power [they have in] themselves," but are instead "trained by the Aeonic Copies, which receive a pattern of their souls while they are still in the world. After the individual procession of the aeons, they come into being and they are individually transferred from the antitype of the Sojourn to the truly existent Sojourn, from the antitype of Repentance to the truly existent Repentance, [and from the] antitype of Self-generated (Aeons) [to the] truly existent [Self-generated (Aeons)], and so on."

22. *Marsanes* (X 2,12-4,23) enumerates each of these levels as thirteen "seals" in ascending order. Thus the first through third seals are the "material and cosmic" (perhaps the sublunar realms including the "ethereal earth"), the fourth seems to be "incorporeal" (perhaps the Sojourn), the fifth is the Repentance, the sixth the Self-begotten ones, the seventh Autogenes, the eighth Protophanes, the ninth probably Kalyptos, the tenth Barbelo, the eleventh and twelfth the Invisible Spirit and his Triple Powered One, and the thirteenth and highest "seal" is the unknown Silent One.

structure of the Hidden ones [34] and imposed order according to the transcendent order [35] and according to the Hidden structure. [36] They began from the bottom up **LXI** [1] so that the construction might fit [2] together:

Now he created the atmospheric [3] realm as
a dwelling place for those who [4] came forth that
they might abide in it until [5] the confirmation of those below them. [6]
Next, the true Sojourn; [7]
within this, the place of the (true) Repentance; [8]
within this, the (true) Atmospheric [9] Copies.
Next, [10] the Sojourn;
the Repentance; [11]
within this, the Self-generated [12] Copies in that place. [13]

They were baptized in the name of the Autogenes, [14] the God over them. [15]
And they placed powers [16] there over the Spring [17] of Living Water, who were [18] brought forth as they came. These [19] are the names of the powers over [20] the Living Water:
Michar, [21] Micheus; and
they (the waters) are purified by [22] Barpharanges.
And [23] within these, the Aeons of Sophia; [24]
within these the real [25] Truth.
There are there Pistis Sophia [26] and
the pre-existent Jesus: [27] the one who lives, the atmospheric one, and [28]
his twelve Aeons. [29]
Placed there were Sel<d>ao [30] and Eleinos and Zogenethlos [31] and
Selmelche<l>
and the [32] Self-generated Aeons, and
within [33] it were placed the Four Luminaries [34]
Eleleth, Davei<th>e, Oroiael, [**LXII** [1] and Armozel ...].

In *Zostrianos*, the realms above the atmospheric realm are apparently inhabited by disembodied souls during the period between their various incarnations. They each represent different levels of spiritual attainment beyond confinement to the corporeal realm and its thirteen aeons. Each level is marked by a separate baptism appointed for those who achieve it. Below the Barbelo Aeon, there are those who ascend to the atmospheric realm, the Aeonic Copies, the Sojourn, and the Repentance, and within the Barbelo Aeon, there are the perfect individuals in the Autogenes Aeon, the all-perfect ones in the Protophanes Aeon, and those who truly exist in the Kalyptos Aeon (VIII 24,28-25,22).

Before proceeding to a brief characterization of each of the Platonizing Sethian treatises and illustrating their general relationship with one another and with other Sethian treatises, I note several concrete in-

stances of such interrelationships. First, in the three treatises featuring a celestial ascent, *Allogenes* (XI 54,11-37), the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 125,24-126, 17) and *Zostrianos* (VIII 51,24-52,8; 86,13-24; 88,9-25), there occurs a special aretalogical ascription of praise delivered to or invoking certain beings that seem to belong to the Aeon of Barbelo and are associated with her subaeons Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes.[23] These doxologies directed to a somewhat fixed set of beings probably all stem from some kind of liturgical—thus likely communal—practice on the part of Sethian practitioners of visionary ascent. The largely non-Semitic and non-Christian, Graecicizing form of the names of the beings named are not part of the standard repertoire of names invoked in the traditional baptismal context, which suggests that they originated elsewhere.[24]

Second, it is to be noted that *Allogenes* (XI 62,27-63,25) sustains a nearly word-for-word parallel with the Coptic text of the negative theology applied to the Invisible Spirit in the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 24,6-25,6 and II 3,17-35).[25] This may suggest a dependence of *Allogenes* upon some form of the *Apocryphon of John*, which is probably the older of the two texts, or of both *Allogenes* and the *Apocryphon of John* on a common source, probably a pre-Plotinian Middle Platonic commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*. Finally, even though not a concrete relationship to another Sethian treatise, one should also bear in mind the nearly word-for-word parallel in a negative theological passage shared in common between *Zostrianos* (VIII 64,13-66,11) and Marius Victorinus (*Adversus Arium* I.49,9-40), both of which probably also derive from a Middle Platonic commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*.[26]

While the continuity of these Platonizing Sethian treatises with those Sethian treatises employing the descent pattern is clear, particularly in

23. Parallels cited in Chapter 14, p. 608.

24. These are: Alphleges, Antitheus, Aphredon, Aramen, (H)armedon, Asineus, Beritheus, Deiphaneus, Elemaon, Eliliouphеus, Emouniar, Epiphanios, Erigenaor, Kandephoros, Lalameus, Mellephaneus, Nephredon, Nibareus, Noetheus, Optaon, Orimenios, Senaon, Siou, Ismoun, Solmis, Thalanatheus, Yatomenes(-os), and Yetheus. The names of these beings stand out in contrast to most Sethian *nomina barbara* by the fact that most of them are Greek compounds in -ευς, -ος, -ις and -ιος which seems to be in keeping with the Graecicizing, Platonic terminology of these treatises.

25. Parallels cited in Chapter 12, p. 503.

26. Parallel cited in Chapter 12, p. 505.

the use of a common nomenclature for divine beings and instances of baptismal motifs, these treatises demonstrate the formation of new literary and ritual alliances with other groups whose provenance is unknown, save for their interest in theurgical, magical, and astrological practices and their preoccupation with Platonic philosophical lore as a means of articulating the ascent toward ultimate enlightenment.

1. Zostrianos

Zostrianos is rich in baptismal language, but it uses the imagery of baptism in the name of a divine being solely to delineate the various stages in a supracelestial ascent. Baptism now has nothing to do with a redemptive ritual introduced by a descending figure such as Seth or Christ or the Logos (none of which are mentioned). This interpretation of baptism owes to the influence upon *Zostrianos* of a tradition of visionary ecstatic ascent achieved as a self-performable technique typical of religious Platonism. Nevertheless, in pages 6-62, *Zostrianos* draws on the very sort of baptismal ascent traditions found especially in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, which serve to interpret its Platonizing scheme of ascent and doctrine of transcendent metaphysical levels.

Thus the basic scheme of *Zostrianos* is built around the reception of a graded series of revelations and visions of the transcendental beings appropriate to each successive ontological level revealed to and contemplated by the visionary. At each stage of the ascent, Zostrianos instructed about its character and spiritual inhabitants, whereupon he contemplates them and is assimilated to their nature. Successive stages of the ascent are marked by a graded series of baptisms or washings and sealings.

According to pages 4-7 of *Zostrianos*, after an initial revelation from an angel of Light, Zostrianos freely ascends in a cloud of light through the thirteen cosmic aeons of the Archon up to the ethereal earth and is baptized. He then passes through the copies of the aeons, and is baptized seven times in Living Water, "once for each of the aeons." At the level of the Sojourn he is baptized once, and at the level of the Repentance he is baptized six times. After his fifteenth baptism, Zostrianos ascends to the Self-begotten Aeons and is baptized four times in the name of the divine Autogenes, becoming a different kind of angel with each baptism.

At this point, *Zostrianos* (VIII 6,7-7,1) introduces a block of Sethian baptismal material whose closest parallels occur in the *Gospel of the*

Egyptians (especially III 64,9-65,26; cf. IV 75,24-77,20). According to it, Zostrianos has been baptized four times in the name of the divine Autogenes by the powers over the living waters, Michar and Micheus, purified by Barpharanges (named Sesengen[bar]pharanges in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*), and sealed by Michar, Micheus, Seldao, Elenos and Zogenethlos, of whom all but the last occur in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* parallel. Then Zostrianos blesses the divine Autogenes, Pigeradamas and his son Seth Emmacha Seth, the Four Luminaries Armozel, Oroiael, Daveithe and Eleleth, Meirothea the mother (of the heavenly Adam, cf. the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 49,1-16 cf. IV 60,30-61,18), Prophania the mother of the Lights (the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 51,14-21), and Plesithea the mother of the angels (the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 56, 5).

Hereupon, *Zostrianos* (VIII 8,7-13,6) includes a revelation by Authrounios concerning the nature of the Aeonic Copies, the Sojourn, the Repentance, and a brief account of Sophia's generation of Matter and of the Archon-creator who makes the copies of the aeons out of his imagination based on merely a reflection of her reflection; it concludes with a blessing of Kalyptos, Protophanes and the perfect Child (i.e. the Triple Male) and his eye Pigeradamas (i.e. the Autogenes).

There then follows a lengthy revelation by Ephesech, the child of the child (a Seth-figure; VIII 13,7-53,14) which is concerned to interpret the waters of baptism in terms of the metaphysical ontology of Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes and the Triple Powered One of the Invisible Spirit, much as it occurs also in *Allogenes*. On pages 29-34 and 47-53 of this revelation we find the *Allogenes*-like material supplemented by the sort of Sethian mythologumena familiar from the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.[27]

27. On pages 29-34 the names of the Four Luminaries are etymologized, e.g. Armozel is related to ἁρμόζειν ("join") and Oroiael to ὁρᾶν (Coptic ⲉⲓⲱⲣϩ, "see") and Daveithe possibly to ἴδειν [*Fιδ-*] (Coptic ⲉⲓⲱⲣϩ, "see"), while Eleleth is related to ὁρμή ("impulse"). The Four Luminaries are said to belong to the Mother and the perfect Mind of Light (in *Gos. Egypt.* they emerge from Prophania and Adamas). There follows a complicated attempt to interrelate Adamas and Seth with Meirothea (the mother of Adamas in *Gos. Egypt.*) who is said to "[belong to] the divine Autogenes; [she derives] from herself and [Adamas], and is a Thought of the perfect Mind because of her Existence, Essence, Quality and Being" (VIII 30,14-20, a play on Platonic/Aristotelian categories). I restore this passage as follows: 30 [14] ⲙⲓⲣⲟⲑⲉⲁ ⲁ[ⲉ] ⲧⲉ [ⲧⲏ ⲉ]ⲧ[ⲁ] [15] ⲡⲓⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲉⲛⲏⲥ ⲛ̄[ⲛⲟ]ⲩⲧⲉ ⲟ[ⲩⲱⲛ̄ϩ] [16] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲥ ⲙⲛ ⲁⲁ[ⲁⲙⲁⲥ·] ⲉⲩ[ⲙ]ⲉⲉⲩ[ⲓⲉ [17] ⲁⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲛⲟⲩ[ⲥ

On pages 47-53, the revelation from Ephesech takes up with traditional Sethian materials again. In particular, the remaining Sethian baptismal personalia not mentioned on page 6 appear, but with such great variation in order and grouping that one wonders whether the author of *Zostrianos* any longer understood their traditional significance. It appears that the baptismal personalia listed in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 64,9-65,26) have been distributed by the author of *Zostrianos* in two separate contexts (page 6 during Zostrianos' baptism and pages 47-53 in Ephesech's revelation).[28]

At the conclusion of Ephesech's revelation, Zostrianos is baptized a fifth time in the Autogenes and becomes divine. He is then baptized five more times and sees Youel, the Four Luminaries of the aeon of Protophanes, and a number of other beings peculiar to *Zostrianos*. Perhaps these fivefold baptisms in the name of the Autogenes have something to do with the rite of the Five Seals.

At this point begins the revelation of Yoel. Ephesech introduces Zostrianos to the presence of Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus and Gamaliel and Gabriel who provide the crowns of light that bear four kinds of seals signifying the triple-classes belonging to the Invisible Spirit. Apparently, they have something to do with the three "kinds" or "races" belonging to Autogenes, Protophanes and Kalyptos, and which seem to correspond respectively to the "perfect individuals," "those who exist together," and those who "truly exist," just as in *Allogenes*. Then Zostrianos is baptized twice more, first in living water, perhaps in the name of the perfect Mind Protophanes, and second in the aeon of the Triple Male Child, whom he sees. Herewith the series of baptisms in *Zostrianos* is completed. Zostrianos has become perfect. Unlike the figures of Allogenes and Marsanes, who apparently ascend to the very summit of

N̄|ⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ [18] ⲧⲉⲧⲉ ⲧⲱⲥ N̄ϩⲩ|ⲡⲁⲣⲝ|ⲓⲥ ⲭ|ⲉ| ⲟⲩ ⲧⲉ [19] ⲏ ⲭⲉ ⲛⲉⲥⲱⲟⲟⲩ [ⲡⲉ N̄ⲁ|ⲱ N̄ⲣⲏⲧⲉ [20] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲭⲉ ⲥ̄ⲱⲟ[ⲟⲩ] In all this, Protophanes is the Mind, Meirothea is the Thought of the Mind, Autogenes is the Logos and Gnosis of the Mind, the Four Luminaries are perhaps seen as words (i.e. σπερματικοὶ λόγοι) of the Mind, and Adam and Seth are seen as the Gnosis of the Logos.

28. Signifying by parentheses those not contained in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. (III 64,9-65,26), these include: Gamaliel, Strempsouchos, Akramas, (Loel), Mnesinous, Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus, (Ormos), Kamaliel(!), Isauel, (Audael), Abrasax, (Phaleris, Phalses, Eurios, Stetheus), Theopemptos, Eurymeneus, Olsen, and others, including Samblo (and the previous revealer Authrounios).

reality, Zostrianos' ascent terminates in the Protophanes aeon. Here, he is handed over to the guidance of Salamex, Selmen and Armê, the Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo (who are also featured in *Allogenes*, XI 56,24-27) who will guide Zostrianos into the vision of the totality of the Aeon of Barbelo and of the ultimate Invisible Spirit and his Triple Powered One.

In sum, it seems that Zostrianos is baptized at least twenty-two times in the course of his ascent, once at the airy earth, seven times in the copies of the aeons, once in the Sojourn and six times in the Repentance for a subtotal of fifteen. Then at the level of the Self-begotten ones he is baptized four times (once for each of the Four Luminaries) by the traditional Barbeloite baptizers and purifiers, at the level of Autogenes he is baptized a fifth time and becomes divine, once again at the level of the Triple Male Child and becomes truly existing, and, it seems, once again at the level of Protophanes, where he becomes perfect, for a subtotal of seven, and a grand total of some twenty-two baptisms or washings. Although the fragmentary state of the text precludes certainty on the total number of baptisms or the precise significance of each, it is clear that baptism has here become interpreted as a metaphor for the stages by which a visionary becomes assimilated to the being and nature of each level of the transcendent realm to which he or she contemplatively ascends.[29]

Once the revelation and the attendant vision are complete, Zostrianos descends from the Protophanes Aeon to the Self-generated Aeons (receiving there a pure perceptible image), thence to the Aeonic Copies and from the Aeonic copies to the atmospheric realm (where he writes the three wooden tablets of the revelation), and finally returns to the perceptible cosmos where he puts on and empowers his "uninstructed" earthly "image" in which he goes about preaching the truth to everyone.

In the course of his ascent, Zostrianos undergoes a sequence of spiritual transformations: up the scale of reality from perceptible to divine, divine to truly existing, truly existing to perfect, perfect to all-perfect, and back down the scale of reality from all-perfect to perfect, and perfect to perceptible. Matching these spiritual transformations, Zostrianos is successively transformed from a morally improved into an intellectu-

29. For a fuller discussion of the visionary ascent in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, see Chapter 15 on "The Knowledge of God in the Platonizing Sethian treatises."

ally awakened earthly being, from an earthly being into a glory, from a glory into various kinds of angel, and from an angel into a divine being.

2. Allogenes

We now briefly summarize the epistemology and ontology of *Allogenes* as it is articulated in the context of a contemplative ascent leading to enlightenment, which is treated more fully and comparatively in Chapter 15. In *Allogenes* (XI 58,26-61,21), the ascent is tripartitioned into separate but successive stages, just as its general ontology is tripartitioned, since the object of the ascent is to become assimilated with each higher level of being through which one passes. Rather than marking the stages of the ascent by successive baptisms, as in *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* identifies them according to the epistemological or cognitive state achieved by the visionary at each level. As in *Zostrianos* (but not *Marsanes*), each stage of the ascent is prefaced by instruction from a revealer.

The manner of ascent through the lowest level of the intelligible realm, the Aeon of Barbelo, is revealed by Youel in five speeches to Allogenes (XI 45,6-57,32). The manner of ascent to the Invisible Spirit through the Triple-Powered One is revealed by the three "Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo" (XI 58,26-61,22); this second stage of ascent is structured in terms of the tripartite nomenclature previously applied to the Triple-Powered One in XI 49,26-38.[30] The manner of the final stage

30. In the section dealing with the ascent, the term Existence (ὕπαρξις) replaces the term "Essentiality" as the designation for the highest level of the Triple Powered One, and the term "blessedness" replaces the term "Mentality" for its lowest level. In the course of the ascent, Allogenes experiences great "blessedness," a term that appears to designate the attainment of self-knowledge, and which is also an attribute of the highest level of the Aeon of Barbelo (Kalyptos, XI 58,7-20) as well as the main attribute of the lowest level of the Triple-Powered One. Such visionary contemplation thus entails an assimilation of mental states to the ontological character of the level to which one ascends. There are two further witnesses for the correspondence between Blessedness and Mentality: *Zostrianos* VIII 15,3-12: "[These are the] perfect waters: the [water] of Life, which is that of Vitality, in which you have now been [baptized] in Autogenes; the [water] of Blessedness, which is [that of] Mentality, in which you shall be baptized in Protophanes; and the water of Existence, which is that of Divinity, which belongs to Kalyptos," and Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* I.52,3-5 [Henri-Hadot]: *Deus potentia est istarum trium potentiarum, existentiae, vitae, beatitudinis, hoc est eius quod est esse, quod vivere, quod intellegere.* The term Blessedness also figures in the triad Blessedness, Perfection and Divinity

of ascent to the Unknowable One, however, cannot be conveyed by a positive descriptive revelation, but only by a "primary revelation of the Unknowable One."[31] This turns out to be the long negative theology in XI 61,32-64,36. On completion of the ascent, Allogenes' appropriate response will be to record and safeguard the revelation he has received for the benefit of "the worthy" who will come after him (the Sethians) and entrust its proclamation to his confidant Messos (XI 68,16-69,16).

The revealer Youel instructs Allogenes concerning the initial part of the ascent to "the God who truly [pre-exists]," which requires a perfect seeking of the Good within oneself, by which one knows oneself as one who exists with the pre-existent God. According to XI 50,10-36, the wisdom conveyed by Youel's initial revelation of the Aeon of Barbelo and of the Triple-Powered One will restore Allogenes to his primordial, unfallen condition. It will invest Allogenes' "thought" with the power requisite to distinguish between "immeasurable and unknowable" things, the contents of the Barbelo Aeon and the principles beyond it, causing Allogenes to fear that his learning has exceeded normal limits.[32] In XI 52,7-21, after Youel's initial revelation of the contents of the Aeon of Barbelo, Allogenes reports that his soul went slack with disturbance. Turning to himself, he sees the light surrounding him and the Good within him and becomes divine, which Youel interprets as a completion of wisdom sufficient to receive a revelation of the Triple-Powered One.

Interpreted in the light of the ontology of the treatise, it seems as if Allogenes has become successively assimilated to the various levels of the Barbelo Aeon: first, to the level of the "individuals" within Autogenes, and second, to the level of "those who are unified" within Protophanes, and third, to "those who truly exist" in Kalyptos. This initial stage of ascent is alluded to in XI 48,6-38, where it says that the indi-

(XI 62,28-36; 63,33-37; cf. 55,26-28; the source of this triad is the *Apocryphon of John* BG 24,9-12; II 3,20-22). In *Allogenes*, the term Blessedness occurs consistently, while the term Perfection varies with Goodness and Existence and the term Divinity is once replaced with Silence.

31. ⲟⲩⲱⲟⲣⲡ ⲛ̄ⲟⲩⲱⲛ̄ϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡⲓⲁⲧⲥⲟⲩⲱⲛ̄ϩ; in *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 125,11-22) this primary revelation seems to be called a "command," ⲟⲩⲁϩ-ⲥⲁϩⲛⲉ.

32. Perhaps "immeasurable" refers to the intelligible realm of the Ideas and Forms which Platonists regarded as transcending the realm of geometrical magnitudes (τὰ μέτρα, τὰ μέγεθα), and "unknowable" refers to the principles beyond them (cf. *Timaeus* 53D, "known only by God and the one among men dear to him").

viduals inhabiting the Autogenes level of the Barbelo Aeon cannot attain a revelation of the Triple Powered One who dwells beyond the perfection of being by an act of mind alone (which only apprehends the realm of mere being); yet once they "unify" (at the level of Protophanes) they can *apprehend* the Triple Powered One by the passive receipt of a "first thought" (or "preconception") that confers authentic being, that is, not merely determinate being, but absolutely perduring and stable being imbued with the "hiddenness of Existence" characteristic of the still higher level of Kalyptos. Yet even this power of positive apprehension is insufficient for comprehending the Invisible Spirit, who transcends determination, perdurance, and even knowledge itself and so is unknowable even by Youel's perfect comprehension (XI 53,18-23).

At the conclusion of the "hundred years" of preparation, Allogenes reports that he saw Autogenes, the Triple Male, Protophanes, Kalyptos, the Aeon of Barbelo, and the "primal origin of the One without origin," that is, the Triple-Powered One of the Invisible Spirit (XI 57,29-58,26).[33] One should probably understand this as Allogenes' ascent through the various levels of the Aeon of Barbelo up to and including the lowest aspect ("blessedness" or Mentality) of the Triple-Powered One, which would be identical with the entirety of the Aeon of Barbelo itself. Up to this point, Allogenes still wears his earthly garment (58,29-30).

This initial vision culminates with Allogenes' receipt of a luminous garment by which he is taken up to "a pure place" (XI 58,31), where he

33. Although the clause-division is somewhat obscure, the sequence of visions seems to be: 1) The good divine Autogenes; 2) the Savior, the youthful, perfect Triple Male; 3) the noetic, perfect Protophanes-Harmedon (i.e. the goodness of the Triple Male?); 4) the blessedness of Kalyptos; 5) the προαρχή (ϯϣⲟⲣⲡ ⲛⲁⲣⲭⲏ) of blessedness, the Aeon of Barbelo full of divinity; and 6) the προαρχή (ϯϣⲟⲣⲡ ⲛⲁⲣⲭⲏ) of the one without ἀρχή, the spiritual, invisible Triple-Powered One, the "All" that is higher than perfect. It is difficult to tell whether the phrase in XI 58,15-16 "and his goodness" (ⲙⲛ ϯⲙⲛⲧⲁⲅⲁⲑⲟⲥ ⲛⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ) should be associated with Triple Male or with Protophanes, and this puzzle is related to the question of the status of the Triple Male, who is often associated closely with Protophanes, but on page 51 seems to function as an entity recapitulating the triad Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes (where he is also associated with "salvation"). It is difficult to determine the referent of the two instances of ἀρχή as well as the meaning of the term itself. "The one without ἀρχή" likely refers to the Invisible Spirit, while the "primary ἀρχή" seems to refer to something ranked below one without origin, most likely the Triple-Powered One.

transcends ("stands upon") his knowledge (characterized by blessedness and self-knowledge) of the individual constituents of the Barbelo-Aeon. He is now ready for "holy powers" revealed to him by the "Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo" to encourage him to "strive for" an even higher knowledge toward which he had already "inclined," namely "the knowledge of the Universal Ones," that is, of the Triple-Powered One and the Invisible Spirit (59,2-3).

The ascent beyond the Aeon of Barbelo to the Unknowable One is first revealed to Allogenes by holy powers (XI 59,4-60,12) and then actually narrated (XI 60,12-61,22) by Allogenes in a way quite similar to the revelation, yielding what amounts to two accounts of the ascent. Having surpassed his active, earthly knowledge and inclining toward the passive knowledge of the Universal Ones (the Triple-Powered One and the Invisible Spirit, XI 59,2-3), Allogenes attains first the level of blessedness (i.e., Mentality), at which one knows one's proper self, sees the good in oneself and becomes divine (XI 59,9-13; 60,14-18). Next, as he "seeks himself," Allogenes ascends (ἀναχωρεῖν) to the level of Vitality, characterized by an undivided, eternal, intellectual motion, a supra-eidetic realm, where one achieves partial stability (he stands not firmly but quietly, XI 59,14-16; 60,19-28). Finally Allogenes achieves the level of Existence, characterized by a completely inactive "stillness" and "standing" (XI 59,19-26; 60,28-37). He is filled with a "primary revelation of the unknowable One" that empowers and permanently strengthens him, enabling him to receive an incognizant knowledge of the unknowable One.

At this point, having assimilated himself to the primal modality of the Triple-Powered One, Allogenes can no longer ascend to any higher level, but must avoid any further effort lest he dissipate his inactivity and fall away from the passivity, concentratedness, and instantaneousness of the primary revelation to follow (XI 59,26-60,12). In a state of utter passivity, Allogenes receives a "primary revelation of the Unknowable One" (XI 59,28-29; 60,39-61,1) characterized as a cognitively vacant knowledge of the Unknowable One (XI 59,30-32; 60,8-12; 61,1-4). This knowledge can be articulated only by an extensive negative theology (XI 61,32-62,13; supplemented by a more affirmative theology, XI 62,14-67,20).

While *Zostrianos* briefly narrates Zostrianos' descent, Allogenes' descent is not narrated. However, the character of the treatise as his revela-

tion to his "son" Messos presupposes his descent to earth, where he writes down the treatise named after him as an earthly transcript of his own revelatory experiences for his worthy successors and deposits it on a mountain, leaving to his son Messos the task of proclaiming them.

3. The Three Steles of Seth

In the *Three Steles of Seth*, the traditional two steles or tablets of stone and brick on which Seth preserved from destruction by flood or fire the vast sum of astrological lore revealed to him (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.67.1-71.5; Pseudo-Malalas, *Chronologica* 6.7-20; Georgias Monachus, *Chronicon* 10.12-24) have now become three steles recording three doxological hymns addressed by Seth to the respective members of the Sethian divine triad: his father Pigeradamas, the Autogenes Son; the mother Barbelo; and the pre-existent Father. These hymns of praise, preserved for the elect, "living and unshakable race" and discovered by Dositheus, the supposed founder of Samaritan Gnosticism, constitute a virtual Sethian hymnal. After Seth's initial praise of Pigeradamas and the divine Autogenes, those directed to Barbelo and the pre-existent One are cast in the first person plural, as if to be used during a communal ritual of celestial ascent practiced by a community considering themselves to be Seth's descendants. Evidently, the hymns of the first and second steles, addressed to Pigeradamas, Autogenes and the male virginal Barbelo, are used in the ascent through the threefold Aeon of Barbelo, and that of the third stele is used in the salvific ascent to the pre-existent paternal non-being. Once this spiritual acme is achieved, the worshipers enter into a silent act of praise tantamount to cognitive assimilation to the supreme Father, after which they descend through the three levels in reverse order. One is led to suppose that a mystagogue may have spoken these prayers in the presence of a group of contemplative practitioners, as a way of articulating the stages of mental abstraction and refinement experienced by them.

4. Marsanes

Marsanes is a Sethian revelation discourse that serves to remind, amplify and supplement gnostic teaching already possessed by its intended audience by means of the revelatory experience of a single exceptional individual functioning as prophet and teacher for a Gnostic community. The doctrine of the thirteen seals or levels of being extending from the

earthly to the highest divine realms[34] are merely summarized for the benefit of an audience already schooled in it; they are roughly the same as those mentioned in *Zostrianos* and to a lesser extent in *Allogenes*. These levels are the object of a visionary ascent which the main speaker, presumably Marsanes, has just undergone:

> **X 5** [17] I have discriminated (διακρίνειν, cf. Sophist 253DE) [18] and have attained the boundary of the partial, sense-perceptible [19] world (and) [20] the entire realm [21] of the incorporeal essence (οὐσία). And [22] the intelligible world knew [23] by discrimination [24] that in every respect the sense-perceptible [25] world is [worthy] [26] of being preserved entire, [for] [27] I have not ceased speaking [of the] [28] Autogenes (Self-generated One), [lest] [29] [anyone] be [ignorant] **6** [1] in turn of the entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm).

In the course of his ascent, it seems that Marsanes, like Zostrianos, had posed various questions concerning the nature of the beings to which he contemplatively assimilates himself, such as Barbelo (X 4,24-10,29, esp. 10,7-12), the Triple-Powered one (X 14,15-16,2), probably the Invisible Spirit, and the supreme Silent One (X 16,3-16). As in the *Three Steles of Seth*, the community's experience replicates that of the visionary: "Those that are within me were completed together with all the rest" (X 8,2-4). Indeed it replicates that of the divine powers who themselves can say (X 9,21-27): "We all have withdrawn (ἀναχωρεῖν) to ourselves. We have [become] silent, [and] when we [too] came to know [that he is] the Three-Powered, [we] bowed down; we [gave glory and we] blessed him." As in *Allogenes*, true insight is achieved in a silent (i.e., cognitively vacant) knowledge:

> **X 8** [18] When the third [19] power (i.e. the Barbelo Aeon) of the Triple Powered One [20] contemplated (νοεῖν) him (the Triple Powered One), [21] it said to me (Marsanes), "Be silent [22] lest you should know and flee [23] and come before me. But [24] know (νοεῖν) that this One was [25] [silent], and concentrate on understanding (νόημα)".

34. In reverse order, these levels are: the Unknown Silent One, the non-being (Invisible) Spirit, the Triple Powered Spirit, Barbelo, Kalyptos (perhaps the [head] of Protophanes), the first-appearing (Protophanes) male Mind (the intelligible world proper), Autogenes (where salvation and wisdom are available), the Self-generated Aeons (partially existing immaterial being who have ἐπιστήμη), the Metanoia (existing "in Marsanes"), the Paroikesis, the Antitypoi, the Ge Aerodios, and the Kosmos Aisthetos.

Even though the ascent pattern is basic to *Marsanes*, Autogenes is said to extend his saving presence down to the level of his own Self-generated Aeons (X 5,17-6,16) and, "through (the instrumentality of) Sophia," even down to the level of the Sojourn (X 3,25-4,2). Although this descent seems unrelated to the triple descent pattern in other Sethian treatises, it seems to function here as a prototypical anticipation of Marsanes' own function as a salvific prophet.

Not only are there traces of the descent pattern in *Marsanes*, but, it seems, also of the Sethian baptismal rite. The terms "seal" (σφραγίς, X 2,12-13; 34,28; 66,[4]; σφραγίζειν, 66,[3]), "washing" (55,20?) and "cleanse" (66,1) may suggest a connection between baptism and visionary ascent similar to that found in *Zostrianos*. Pages 64-66 seem to narrate Marsanes' vision of certain angels, which include the traditional Sethian "minister" or "receiver" Gamaliel, who is over the spirit(s); just as he raptures baptismal participants into heaven in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 48,26-30) and *Melchizedek* (IX 5,17-20) he "takes" Marsanes to witness an everflowing fountain of "living" water, a "cleansing" and an adornment with a "celestial" seal. There are also references to the use of waxen images and emerald stones (X 36,1-6) and extensive discussion of the theory of the letters of the Greek alphabet and their combinations (pages 25-33), as well as of arithmology (pages 33-34), which illustrate the construction of the cosmic soul and the incorporation of souls into human bodies in the psychogonia of Plato's *Timaeus* 35A-44D.[35] Among the Sethian treatises, discussion of the cosmic soul occurs elsewhere only in *Zostrianos* (VIII 31,2-11). The ability to classify the various configurations or states of the soul—both cosmic and individual, both disembodied and embodied—is related to the need for careful observation of the planets, stars and Zodiacal signs, characterized by properties similar to those of the soul and of the letters of the alphabet.

Of the four descent pattern treatises, *Marsanes* and the *Three Steles of Seth* stand out as representative of an emphasis on the practices of an entire community, while *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* are much more concerned with the enlightenment of the individual reader. Moreover, while the *Three Steles of Seth* is basically a structured collection of ecstatic doxologies to be used in the course of a communal practice of visionary

35. See discussion in Chapter 14, pp. 614 ff.

ascent, *Marsanes* not only encourages its recipients to engage in a similar practice of ascent as well as to master certain theurgical techniques, but is also clearly concerned with the behavior of members of a community and their interaction with those outside its immediate boundaries who earnestly seek the truth. The chief interest of the author seems to be the process of community formation and building.

II. Summary of Main Doctrinal and Literary Features

We have pointed out a few instances of direct literary dependence, evidence of redactional activity within certain treatises, as well as other kinds of thematic and literary interdependencies in addition to the doctrines and mythologumena they share in common. By virtue of its concluding aretalogy on the triple descent of Pronoia, the *Apocryphon of John* is closely related to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. The *Trimorphic Protennoia*'s insistence on the relative innocence of Sophia from responsibility for the creation of the physical world by her son Yaldabaoth, is shared by the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. The baptismal doctrine of *Trimorphic Protennoia* also seems to sustain a close relationship especially to the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Zostrianos*, the *Apocryphon of John*, and, more distantly, to *Melchizedek*, perhaps *Marsanes* and even the *Apocalypse of Adam*. Finally, the four "ascent pattern" treatises share a number of common characteristics. They are all make use of a specific implementation of Platonic metaphysics, share the same basic ontological hierarchy, offer the same model of salvific visionary ascent, and exhibit no obvious Christian features, although they differ in details. While *Zostrianos* portrays and ascent only to the mid-level of the Barbelo Aeon, the other three treatises reckon with an ascent to the very acme of reality, the supreme deity. And by way of comparison, *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* devote more attention to the enumeration of ontological levels below the Barbelo Aeon.

Given this profile of the dossier of Sethian texts, the next step is to try to use these interdependencies to sketch out a likely history of the Sethian movement and religion, as well as a provisional chronological framework for this development.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CHRONOLOGY AND REDACTION OF THE SETHIAN TREATISES: PART I TREATISES OF THE DESCENT PATTERN

Having now surveyed the main Sethian traditions as they occur in the Nag Hammadi Codices and other sources, the next step is to construct a history of these traditions, perhaps even a history of the Sethian movement.[1] Any attempt to construct a history of Sethianism must in part rely on an analysis of the composition and redaction of the Sethian treatises with a view toward establishing the rough sequence in which they were composed and the distinctive traditional sources they incorporated, bearing in mind that at each stage it is impossible to know which version of a particular document may have been available to the composers of the various treatises.

As a starting point, a general time frame within which the bulk of the Sethian treatises were produced and circulated is provided by references to Sethian teachings and/or literature by Irenaeus in the fourth quarter of the second century, and by Plotinus and Porphyry in the third quarter of the third. On the one hand, Irenaeus of Lyons knew some version of the *Apocryphon of John*, which he summarized in his *Adversus Haereses* (I.29) somewhere between 175 and 180 CE, and on the other hand, in his *Vita Plotini* 16, Porphyry attests that versions of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* circulated among members of Plotinus' seminar in Rome in the period 240-265 CE, and indeed the concluding section (*Ennead* II, 9) of Plotinus' antignostic *Großschrift* has certain doctrines of *Zostrianos* clearly in view. To these fixed points, one must add two other—more conjectural—synchronisms: first, as will be argued below, the final section of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* seems to reflect the debate over the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel that occurred around the time of the writing of the First Letter of John, perhaps ca. 125 CE, and second, as

1. See my "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 55-86.

noted in the previous chapter, both *Zostrianos* and Marius Victorinus' *Adversus Arium* I.49-50 utilized a common negative theological source that seems to be from a Middle Platonic commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* of uncertain date, but which I shall argue is likely pre-Plotinian, and a similar origin may be posited for the negative theological source common to *Allogenes* and the *Apocryphon of John*.

One will therefore expect to place most Sethian treatises within the 125 year period, from about 125 to 250 CE, encompassed by these synchronisms. But it is also possible to extend this time frame both forward and backward. On the one hand, for reasons to be offered in Chapters 10 and 13, it appears that the author of *Marsanes* was influenced by certain distinctive features in the metaphysics of Iamblichus and of his pupil Theodore of Asine around 320 CE. On the other hand, if indeed the last section of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* reflects the controversy surrounding the Fourth Gospel around 125 CE (see especially Chapter 7), the redactional character of both this passage and that of the Fourth Gospel requires that one extrapolate backwards some years to posit a point of origin for the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, say around 120 CE. Thus we locate the composition of the Sethian treatises in the period 120 to 325 CE.

I. 100-125 CE: THE EARLIEST SETHIAN COMPOSITIONS

A. Hymnic Accounts of the Savior's Descent

In the late first century, the Fourth evangelist incorporated into his Gospel its famous prologue, according to which the divine Word, containing life and light as the creator of all things, 1) shined into a dark world that did not recognize him, 2) came to—but was not received by—his own people, but 3) finally he became flesh and was received by those who believed in his "name."

> **1** [1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He was in the beginning with God; [3] all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. [4] In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
>
> ([6] There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. [7] He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. [8] He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.)

> [9] The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. [10] He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. [11] He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.
>
> [12] But to all who received him, (who believed in his name), he gave power to become children of God; [13] (who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.) [14] And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (RSV)

It is interesting to find a very close equivalent to the prologue in the second half of the Naasene Hymn or Psalm (Hippolytus, *Ref.* V.10.2) where Jesus says:[2]

> Look Father: This prey (the fallen soul) to evils is wandering away to earth, far from thy Spirit, and she seeks to escape the bitter Chaos but knows not how to win through. For that reason send me, Father. Bearing Seals I shall descend; I will pass through all the Aeons; I shall reveal all the mysteries and I shall deliver the secrets of the holy way, calling them Gnosis. (trans. Markovich)

To these hymnic passages one might also add the following passage from the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (VIII 136,16-137,2):

> **VIII 136** [16] Next concerning the Pleroma, it is I who [17] was sent down in the body [18] because of the seed which had fallen away. [19] And I came down into their mortal mold, [20] but they did not [21] recognize me. They were thinking that I [22] was a mortal man. And I [23] spoke with him who belongs to me and he [24] hearkened ... [26] in order that [27] he might enter into the inheritance [28] of his Fatherhood. And I took **137** [1] [them up into the aeons and] they were filled [2] [...] in his salvation.

These passages have been influenced by the same complex of ideas, based ultimately on the myth of the descent of divine wisdom and her

2. Hippolytus, *Ref.* V.10.2 (Wendland): εἶπεν δ' Ιησοῦς· ἐσόρα πάτερ· / ζήτημα κακῶν <τόδ'> ἐπὶ χθόνα / ἀπὸ σῆς πνοιῆς ἐπιπλάζεται. / ζητεῖ δὲ φυγεῖν τὸ πικρὸν χαός, / καὶ οὐκ οἶδεν <ὅ>πως διελεύσεται. / τούτου με χάριν πέμψον, πάτερ· / σφραγῖδας ἔχων καταβήσομαι, / αἰῶνας ὅλους διοδεύσω, / μυστήρια πάντα δ' ἀνοίξω, / μορφὰς δὲ θεῶν ἐπιδείξω· / [καὶ] τὰ κεκρυμμένα τῆς ἁγίας ὁδοῦ, / γνῶσιν καλέσας, παραδώσω. See M. MARKOVICH, "The Naasene Psalm in Hippolytus (*Haer.* 5.10.2)," in *Rediscovery* 2, 770-778. For M. TARDIEU (*Écrits Gnostiques: Codex de Berlin*, 42-44), the Psalm's author depended on a collection of wisdom hymns analogous to the *Odes of Solomon* produced ca. 120 C. E. by the Johannine school, which contained the Pronoia monologue prior to its incorporation into the *Apocryphon of John*.

search for a dwelling place among those who might respond to her (Sirach 24:1-22; Wisdom of Solomon 7:21-17; 9:13-18;10:1-4; 14:3; 1 Enoch 42). The Naasene psalm reflects the descent of a revealer bearing seals into Chaos and its bitterness to rescue the soul below, and probably originated as part of a baptismal liturgy. The passage from *Peter to Philip* seems to be a direct development of the Johannine prologue: the Logos who created the world is unrecognized until he speaks with certain of his own who recognize his voice.

As we will see in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the motif of the incognito descent of the savior through the various levels of spiritual powers is rather widespread, occurring also in the *Ascension of Isaiah* (X.12-13; 17-28), Firmicus Maternus' *De errore profanarum religionum* 24, and in Irenaeus' Ophites (*Adversus Haereses* I.30.12-13, "They further declare that he [Christ] descended through the seven heavens, having assumed the likeness of their sons, and gradually emptied them of their power"). In all these cases, the unimpeded descent of the savior paves the way for the unimpeded ascent of the soul.

B. The Pronoia Monologue of the *Apocryphon of John*

While the Johannine prologue and the passages from the Naasene Psalm and the *Letter of Peter to Philip* tell of the descent of the soul and identify the masculine figure of Jesus as savior, the Pronoia monologue that concludes the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 30,11-31,25) tells of the three-fold descent of a feminine figure, Pronoia (or the remembrance thereof), on the third of which she succeeds in raising Pronoia's fallen members from their cosmic prison. In the Pronoia monologue and in the Jewish wisdom poems, the feminine identity of the revealer-savior is preserved, and not altered in favor of the masculine identity of the Christian savior, as it is in the Johannine prologue (the masculine Logos), the Naasene psalm, and the *Letter of Peter to Philip*.

For purposes of discussion, I reproduce here the text of the Pronoia monologue according to the versification of Michael Waldstein in his paper "The Providence Monologue in the Apocryphon and the Johannine Prologue," in which the underscored portions seem to be later additions:[3]

1: **30** [11] I, therefore, [12] the perfect Providence (πρόνοια) of the all, [13] took form in my seed (σπέρμα), for (γάρ) I existed [14] first, going on every road. [15]
2: For (γάρ) I am the richness of the light; [16]
I am the remembrance of the Pleroma.
3: And (δε) I [17] went into the realm of darkness,
and [18] I endured (ἀέχειν) till I entered the midst [19] of the prison.
4: And the foundations of chaos (χάος) [20] shook.
5: And I hid myself from them because of [21] their wickedness (κακία),
and they did not recognize me.
6: Again (πάλιν) [22] I returned, for the second time, [23]
and I went about.
7: I came forth from those who belong to the light, [24]
which is I, the remembrance of the Providence (πρόνοια). [25]
8: I entered into the midst of darkness and [26] the interior of Hades,
since I was seeking (to accomplish) [27] my task (οἰκονομία).
9: And the foundations of chaos (χάος) [28] shook,
that they might fall down upon those who [29] are in chaos (χάος) and
might destroy them. [30]
10: And again I ran up to my luminous root [31]
lest they be destroyed before [32] the time.
11: Still (ἔτι) for a third time [33] I went
12: —I am the light which exists in the light, [34]
I am [35] the remembrance of the Providence (πρόνοια)—
13: that I might [36] enter into the midst of darkness and the **31** [1] interior of Hades,
and I filled my face with [2] the light of the completion (συντέλεια) of their aeon (αἰών). [3]
14: And I entered into the midst of their prison, [4]
which is the prison of the body (σῶμα).
15: And [5] I said, "He who hears, let him get up from the deep [6] sleep."
16: And he wept and shed tears, [7]
bitter tears he wiped from himself [8]
17: And he said, "Who is it that calls my [9] name
and from where has this hope (ἐλπίς) come [10] to me, while I am in the chains of the prison?"

3. M. WALDSTEIN, "The Providence Monologue in the Apocryphon and the Johannine Prologue," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), 369-402, esp. 390-391.

18: And I said, [11] "I am the Providence (πρόνοια) of the pure light; [12]
I am the thinking of the virginal (παρθενικόν) [13] Spirit (πνεῦμα),
who raises you up to the honored [14] place (τόπος).
19: Arise and remember [15] that it is you who hearkened,
and follow [16] your root, which is I, the merciful One,
20: and [17] guard (ἀσφαλίζειν) yourself against [18] the angels (ἄγγελος) of poverty
and the demons (δαίμων) [19] of chaos (χάος) and all those who ensnare you, [20]
21: and beware of the [21] deep sleep
and the enclosure of the inside of Hades." [22]
22: And I raised him up [23] and sealed (σφραγίζειν) him in the light [24] of the water with Five Seals (σφραγίς),
in order that [25] death might not have power over him from this time on.
23: And [26] behold, now I shall go up to the perfect (τέλειον) aeon (αἰών).

The Pronoia monologue exhibits a hymnic structure of three stanzas, whose third stanza contains an elaborate call to awakening (indicated by underlined text in verses 14b-17 and 19-21) that causes a structural imbalance in comparison to the first two. The secondary character of this material is suggested by a literary seam in verse 14b (the gloss explaining the "prison" as the body), by the shift to a singular addressee in verses 15-22 from the plural addressees of the first two stanzas (verses 1-14a), and by the shift from the first person singular narrative in the first two stanzas to the style of third person narrative (verses 16-17) and direct address (verses 15 and 19-21) in the third. Perhaps the original third stanza may have concluded:[4]

4. The *Apocryphon of John* II,*1* 31,3-25: I indicate the suspected glosses by double angle brackets: II 31[3] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲉⲓⲃⲱⲕ̄ ⲉϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲧⲙⲏⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲱⲧⲉ [4] ⲕⲟ ≪ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ̈ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲱⲧⲉⲕⲟ ⲡⲥⲱⲙⲁ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉ [5] ⲭⲁⲓ̈ ⲭⲉ ≪ [ⲭⲉ] ⲡⲉⲧⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ ⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲙ̄ ϕⲓ [6] ⲛⲏⲃ ⲉⲧϩⲟⲣⲱ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁϥⲣⲓⲙⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁϥⲱⲟⲩⲉ ⲣⲙ̄ⲉⲓⲏ [7] ϩⲉⲛⲣⲙ̄ⲉⲓⲏ ⲉⲩϩⲟⲣⲱ ⲁϥϥⲱⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ [8] ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲡⲉϫⲁϥ ϫⲉ ⲛⲓⲙ̄ ⲡⲉⲧ ⲙⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲁ [9] ⲣⲁⲛ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲥⲉⲓ ⲛⲁⲓ̈ ⲧⲱⲛ ⲛ̄ⲟⲓ ⲧⲉⲓϩⲉⲗⲡⲓⲥ [10] ⲉⲓ̈ⲱⲟⲟⲡ ϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ϩⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲙⲣⲣⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉⲱⲧⲉⲕⲟ ≫ ⲁⲩⲱ [11] ⲡⲉϫⲁⲉⲓ ϫⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲧⲉ ⲧⲡⲣⲟⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲙ̄ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ̄ [12] ⲉⲧⲃ̄ⲃⲏⲩ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ ⲙ̄ⲡⲡⲁⲣⲑⲉⲛⲓⲕⲟⲥ [13] ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ̄ⲁ ⲡⲉⲧⲥⲟϩⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲕ ⲉϩⲣⲁⲓ̈ ⲉⲡⲧⲟⲡⲟⲥ [14] ⲉⲧⲧⲁⲉⲓⲏⲩ ≪ ⲧⲱⲟⲩⲛⲕ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲕⲣ̄ⲡⲙⲉⲉⲩⲉ [15] ϫⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲟⲕ ⲡⲉⲛⲧⲁϩⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲕⲟⲩϩⲁⲕ ⲁ [16] ⲧⲉⲕⲛⲟⲩⲛⲉ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲁⲛⲟⲕ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲱⲁⲛ ϩⲧⲏⲩ ⲁⲩ [17] ⲱ ⲛ̄ⲕⲣⲁⲥⲫⲁⲗⲓϫⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲕ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲟⲟⲧⲟⲩ [18] ⲛ̄ⲛⲁⲅⲅⲉⲗⲟⲥ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧϩⲏⲕⲉ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛ̄ⲁⲁⲓⲙⲱⲛ [19] ⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ⲡϫⲁⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ̄ ⲛⲉⲧⲃⲟⲗϫ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲕ ⲧⲏⲣⲟⲩ [20] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛ̄ⲕⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲉⲕⲣⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲓⲧⲛ̄ ⲡϩⲓ [21] ⲛⲏⲃ ⲉⲧϩⲟⲣⲱ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲃⲁⲗⲉⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲥⲁⲛ [22] ϩⲟⲩⲛ ⲛ̄ⲁⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉ ≫ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲉⲓ-ⲧⲟⲩⲛⲟⲩⲥ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ [23] ⲁϫⲱ ⲁⲉⲓⲥϕⲣⲁⲅⲓϫⲉ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟϥ ϩⲛ̄ ⲡⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓⲛ [24] ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲟⲟⲩ

II 31 [3] And I entered into the middle of their prison [4] (...) and [11] I said: "I am the Pronoia of the pure light; [12] I am the Thought of the Virginal [13] Spirit, the one who raises you (originally plural) up to the honored [14] place. (...)"[22] And I raised them (plural original; text now has "him") up [23] and sealed them ("him") in the light [24] of the water with Five Seals in order that [25] death might not have power over them ("him") from this time on. And [26] behold, now I shall go up to the perfect aeon.

In English translation, the deletion of these additional hundred or so words would halve the word count of the third stanza, thus bringing its length more into line with that of the first two. It appears that a redactor has combined two originally independent traditions, a hymnic aretalogy on Pronoia's triple descent and a liturgical fragment containing a call to awakening modeled on one like that quoted by Paul in Eph 5:14 ("Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light") and introduced by a gloss explaining that the prison of chaos is the body. It is likely that both of these traditional pieces were at home in the Sethian baptismal ritual.

Waldstein also presents the following synoptic chart of the Pronoia monologue to show the structure of each of its three parts in relation to one another. The first two visits are thwarted first by the ill-prepared wickedness of her potential followers and second by the impending destructive collapse of the material cosmos they inhabit, while the third descent is successful:

ϩⲛ̄ ⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥϕⲣⲁⲅⲓⲥ ϫⲉⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲛ̄ [25] ⲛⲉⲡⲙⲟⲩ ⲟⲛ̄ⲟⲁⲙ ⲉⲣⲟϥ ϫⲛ̄ ⲙ̄ⲡⲓⲛⲁⲩ.
The hymn contains a brief aretalogical self-predication of the divine Pronoia speaking in the first person singular (31,12-16) followed by the narration of her three descents into Chaos or Hades taking on the form of the seed to save them (30,16-21: 30,21-31: 30,31-31,25). In the third stanza there is a sudden shift from a third person plural to a third person singular designation for her seed, introduced by a gloss in 31,4 identifying the prison of Hades (cf. Christ's descent to the spirits in prison in 1 Pet 3:19) as the prison of the body. This seems to introduce material originally foreign to the hymn (reflected once earlier in *Ap. John* at II 23,30-31) employing the topos of awakening sleepers (cf. Eph 5:14) ensnared in the bonds of oblivion by reminding them of their predicament (II 31,4-10 and 31,14-22). Waldstein hypothesizes that "the redactor of the Monologue probably united two originally independent pieces, a hymn of Providence's triple descent and a liturgical fragment consisting of a call to awakening and its sacramental consummation [thus Waldstein would also include II 31,22-25 in the liturgical fragment], and added an explanatory gloss between them."

FIRST DESCENT	SECOND DESCENT	THIRD DESCENT
	A: DESCENT ANNOUNCED	
1: I, therefore, the perfect Providence of the all, took form in my seed, for I existed first, going on every road	6: Again I returned for the second time, and I went about. 7: I came forth from those who belong to the light,	11: Still for a third time I went
	B: SELF DESCRIPTIONS	
2: For I am the richness of the light; I am the remembrance of the Pleroma	which is I, the remembrance of the Pleroma	12. —I am the light which exits in the light, I am the remembrance of the Pleroma—
	C: TRIP DESCRIBED IN DETAIL	
	1: DESTINATION	
3: And I went into the realm of darkness, and I endured till I entered the middle of the prison.	8: I entered into the midst of darkness and the inside of Hades, since I was seeking (to accomplish) my task.	13: that I might enter into the midst of darkness and the inside of Hades, and I filled my face with the light of the completion of their aeon. 14: And I entered into the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body.
	2: EFFECT	
4: And the foundations of chaos shook.	9: And the foundations of chaos that they might fall down upon those who are in chaos (χάος) and might destroy them	Call of Awakening and Sealing verses 15-22
	3: RETURN	
5: And I hid myself from them because of their wickedness, and they did not recognize me.	10: And again I ran up to my root of light lest they be destroyed before the time	23: And behold, now I shall go up to the perfect aeon.

As Waldstein mentions,[5] not only the Jewish wisdom books mentioned on p. 130, but also the *Sepher Yetzirah* present a similar picture of Wisdom's creative pursuit of all paths for the preservation of the realm for

5. "The Providence Monologue," 393 n. 56.

whose creation she is responsible; the resemblance to the Pronoia of the monologue is evident:

> With thirty two wonderful paths of wisdom, YHWH—the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, the living God, King of the Universe, El Shaddai, Merciful and Gracious, high and exalted, dwelling in eternity, whose name is holy, who is lofty and holy—engraved and created his universe with three books: with letters (scripture), with number, and with word. (*Sepher Yetzirah* 1.1)

Although the Pronoia monologue is somewhat ambiguous on this point, it seems that each successive descent takes Pronoia more deeply into the realm of darkness: at first unnoticed by the powers of chaos, then noticeably shaking the foundations of chaos, thus alerting the powers of the impending end of their aeon, and finally entering the body of her seed who recognize her and raising them beyond the grip of death by means of the Five Seals.

Although present evidence is not conclusive, the parallels in imagery between the Pronoia monologue and the Johannine prologue suggest that, by the end of the first century, the notion of a redeemer's threefold or three-stage descent to rescue those few who recognize him or her from the realm of darkness or chaos to the realm of light became the subject of liturgical celebration in hymnic form. Furthermore, just as the Naasene Psalm speaks of the delivering of "seals" by the savior and just as the Johannine prologue occurs in a context defining the role of John the Baptist in relation to Jesus, one also strongly suspects a baptismal provenance for the composition and use of these materials.

Given its absence in the shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John*, it is likely that this three-stanzaed Pronoia monologue originally circulated apart from the longer version of the *Apocryphon*, and as such, it is possible that it served as the initial inspiration and perhaps the direct source for the original composition of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, which exhibits precisely the same tripartite structure. Significantly, the narrative of the shorter version, which omits the monologue, comes to its high point with the announcement that the blessed Mother-Father has overcome the final outbreak of evil (the sexual mingling of angels with human women) by "taking form in her seed" (BG 75,10-13) and thus "rectifying her seed" (BG 76,1-5) from its "defect" (III 29,1); immediately thereafter, the frame story resumes in which Christ tells John that he had already ascended to the perfect aeon.

On the other hand, by placing the monologue of the essentially feminine figure of Pronoia on the lips of Jesus in the conclusion of the frame story, the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* secondarily identifies an originally feminine revealer figure with Jesus, even though the main body of the work consistently identifies Jesus with Autogenes, the son of Barbelo/Pronoia. Thus Jesus himself, not Barbelo/Pronoia, is the one who overcomes the final outbreak of evil.[6]

II. 125-150+ CE: CHRISTIANIZED SETHIAN TREATISES

A. The *Apocryphon of John*

The Barbeloite report from Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29 and the four versions of the *Apocryphon of John* represent an already Christianized version of the myth of the mother Barbelo as the sender of the primordial saviors Pronoia (Providence), Autogenes and Epinoia (appearing as Sophia and the spiritual Eve), and the eschatological Savior, Pronoia (appearing as the Autogenes, Christianized as Christ). Most scholars agree that an earlier, non-Christian stage of this myth is visible beneath the Christian glosses that identify the Autogenes Son and the Pronoia of the concluding triple-descent monologue with Christ; upon this originally non-Christian layer has been superimposed the narrative frame of the whole, which identifies it as a post-resurrection dialogue between Christ and his disciple John, son of Zebedee.

1. Sources and Redaction

The literary setting of most of the Nag Hammadi treatises that are post-resurrection dialogues between Jesus and his most trusted disciples is placed during the period between Jesus' resurrection and ascension (the *Apocryphon of James* [NHC I,*2*], the *Book of Thomas the Contender* [NHC II,*7*], the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* [NHC III,*4*; BG 8502,*3*], the *Dialogue of the Savior* [NHC III,*5*], the *Letter of Peter to Philip* [NHC VIII,*2*], and in the Berlin Codex, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* [BG 8502,*3*] and the *Gospel of Mary* [BG 8502,*1*]). But the dialogue between John and Jesus in the *Apocryphon of John*, rather like that between Jesus and Peter in the *Apocalypse of Peter* (NHC VII,*3*), is set *after* the ascension, as indeed John testifies in the narrative opening: "He

6. See M. WALDSTEIN, "The Providence Monologue," 390-391.

has [returned] to the [place] from which he came" (NHC II 1,11-12; cf. Jn 13:3; 16:28; 20:17). In this sense, the temporal setting has its closest New Testament parallel in the Apocalypse, where Jesus appears to John of Patmos in the late first century, long after the resurrection. It may be that this narrative frame serves as an index for the time of the shorter version's composition, that is, at a time when John the Son of Zebedee had been accepted as the author of both the Apocalypse and the Fourth Gospel, perhaps in the mid-second century.

According to Waldstein, the main body enveloped by the frame narrative consists of two sections.[7] The first (BG 22,17-44,18; NHC II 2,26-13,13) is a theogony and cosmogony in the form of an expository monologue that begins with the sole existence of a monadic Father, the Invisible Spirit, and narrates its unfolding into the Father, Mother, and Son triad, and the Son's establishment of the Four Luminaries. It concludes with the fall of Sophia and the production of the physical cosmos by her illegitimate offspring Yaldabaoth and his archontic associates, who boasts "I am a jealous god and there is no other God beside me" (BG 44,14-15; NHC II 13,8-9). Immediately after this, the second section (BG 44,19-77,5; NHC II 13,13-31,6) begins, interrupting the initial monologue with a dialogue in which the Savior's revelation is delivered in the form of responses to ten questions posed by John. It is an anthropogony in the form of a midrash on the first seven chapters of Genesis which frequently corrects a traditional misinterpretation ("not as Moses said"). While the first section portrays a gradual devolution, moving from the creation of a world of light through the fall of Sophia and the theft of divine power, the second section portrays a sequence of the enlightening initiatives of the Mother on high aimed at the recovery of this stolen power.

The *Apocryphon of John* is by no means a seamless production. Its first section has a nearly exact parallel in Irenaeus' summary of "Barbeloite" teaching in his *Adversus Haereses* I.29, which begins with the emergence of the Mother Barbelo as the supreme Father's thought and ends with Sophia's generation of the Archon and his boasting in his sole divinity. This section of the *Apocryphon of John* is also roughly parallel to a similar cosmology in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 36,27b-40,29a). It narrates the generation of the Autogenes Son of Barbelo, his

7. M. WALDSTEIN, *The Apocryphon of John: A Curious Eddy in the Stream of Hellenistic Judaism* (privately circulated preprint of 1995), 81-82.

anointing as the Christ, and his establishing of the Four Luminaries, the lowest of which, Eleleth, calls for someone to rule over chaos, whereupon the Epinoia of light (a lower aspect of Barbelo that is identified with Sophia) brings the Archigenetor Yaldabaoth into being, who in turn steals the Epinoia's power to create the lower aeons and humankind. This material common to the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29 may therefore represent the content of the earliest reconstructable version of the *Apocryphon of John*.

The second section of the *Apocryphon of John* has no such exact parallel in Irenaeus' "Barbeloite" summary, suggesting that he knew a version of the *Apocryphon of John* prior to its conversion into a dialogue, and which consisted solely of the first section.[8] However, Irenaeus' immediately succeeding chapter (*Adversus Haereses* I.30) goes on to narrate a myth of certain "others" which, though clearly not exactly equivalent to the second section of the *Apocryphon of John*, nevertheless contains an anthropogony and soteriology with many similarities to it. Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*Haereticarum fabularum compendium* I.13) attributes this material—which is *not* in the form of a midrash on Genesis and shows no trace of dialogue—to certain "Ophites." Perhaps the similar material shared by this excerpt and the second section of the *Apocryphon of John* goes back to a common source.

In addition, both sections of the shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John* contain blocks of secondarily inserted material. One such insertion is likely to be the lengthy negative theology on the supreme monadic Father of the first section (BG 23,3-25,7; NHC II 2,33-4,19); it has no equivalent in Irenaeus' Barbeloite summary, which begins, not with a description of the Father, but immediately with the emergence of Barbelo. Likewise, the flow of the narrative about the Mother's enlightenment of Seth's seed in the second section is clearly interrupted by the insertion of a short treatise (BG 64,13-71,2; NHC II 15,16-27,33) on the destiny of four kinds of souls; the author of the *Apocryphon* has probably adapted it to the frame narrative, recasting it in the form of the Savior's responses to the last six of John's ten questions,[9] in somewhat the same way as *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NHC III,*3* and V,*1*) was developed into the post-resurrection dialogue, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NHC III,*4* and BG, *3*).

8. Noted long ago by H.-M. SCHENKE, "Nag Hammadi Studien I: Das literarische Problem des Apokryphon Johannis," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Gesitesgeschichte* 14 (1962), 57-63.

The longer version of the *Apocryphon* (NHC II and IV) differs from the shorter version (BG and NHC III) mainly by the addition of an excerpt from the "Book of Zoroaster" on the creation of the psychic Adam (II 15,13-19,10) and the Pronoia monologue (II 30,11-31,25), perhaps by separate redactors. The redactor who appended the Pronoia monologue also seems to have brought the *Apocryphon*'s main account of the history of salvation more into line with the doctrine of the monologue by making subtle changes to the text of the main narrative that reflect the monologue's phraseology, as comparison with the shorter version shows.[10] These include: the repeated use (six times compared to once in BG) of the term "Mother-Father" to refer to the "perfect" Pronoia; Pronoia's characterization as "first to come forth" (II 5,11); identifying Pronoia as the source of the divine voice that "came forth" to reveal that "Man exists and the Son of Man" and caused the aeon of the Protarchon and the depths of the abyss to shake at the appearance of her light in the form of the First Man (II 14,13-30), as well as identifying Christ's appearance as an eagle upon the tree of knowledge as a manifestation of "the Epinoia from the holy, luminous Pronoia" in order that he might "awaken them from the depth of sleep" (II 23,26-35). The redactor may also have added the account of the withdrawal of Zôê from Eve (on analogy with the withdrawal of Pronoia from chaos in the monologue) once the Protarchon had noticed her presence in Eve (II 24,8-15).

2. The Anthropogony and Soteriology

The Sethite sacred history that occupies the second half of the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 44,19-77,5, NHC II 13,13-31,6; similarly in other versions), although well-attested in other Sethian treatises, is not paralleled in Irenaeus' "Barbeloite" excerpt (*Adversus Haereses* I.29). Variants of it occur in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. However, a rather similar—but

9. A similar, although independent, catalogue of various kinds of souls and their destinies also occurs in *Zostrianos* (VIII 25,19-28,30; 42,10-44,22).

10. See B. BARC and L. PAINCHAUD, "La réécriture de l'*Apocryphon de Jean* à la lumière de l'hymne final de la version longue," *Le Muséon* 112 (1999), 317-333.

non-Sethian—myth is related by Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* I.30) immediately after his resume of the Barbeloite theogony (*Adversus Haereses* I.29). While Irenaeus ascribed it to anonymous "others" (*alii*), Theodoret (*Haereticarum fabularum compendium* I.13) ascribed it to "Sethians whom some call Ophians or Ophites."

This "Ophite" myth, whose similarity to the *Apocryphon of John* was mentioned in Chapter 3, features a supreme triad of highest beings, (First) Man, his Thought the Son of Man, and a female, the Holy Spirit, the first woman, who bears Christ as the Third Male, as well as his sister Sophia-Prunicos, whose material body descends from the Imperishable Aeon under its own weight and generates the Archon Yaldabaoth. The latter's boast in his sole divinity ("I am God and Father; beyond me there is none") is answered by the Mother's announcement that "the Father of the All, the First Man [and] the Son of Man" are above him. Like the *Apocryphon of John*, the second part of the myth is based on the Genesis anthropogony and genealogy through Seth (and Norea, as in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*), and concludes with a soteriology depicting the descent of Christ, the Third Male (*tertius masculus*), to put on his sister Sophia and rescue the crucified Jesus. The Ophite system attributes repeated salvific acts to Sophia similar to those attributed to Barbelo in the Sethian treatises: providing the divine model for the protoplast, the enlightenment of Eve, preventing her light-trace from conceiving offspring through the Archon, revealing the bitter significance of Adam and Eve's bodies, and aiding the conception of Seth and Norea and in the birth of the "wise Jesus" (sired upon Mary by Yaldabaoth!) The final act of the myth is Christ's (the third Male's) eschatological deliverance of his sister, the lower Sophia, and, after allowing him to be crucified, also of Jesus.

While the absence of the figures of Barbelo, the Four Luminaries, the "unshakable generation" of Seth's "seed," and the sacred baptism of the Five Seals excludes the Sethian character of this "Sethian-Ophite" myth, it nevertheless shares with the *Apocryphon of John* a striking number of similar mythemes, which suggests that the underlying interpretation of Genesis 1-9 as a contest between Yaldabaoth and his mother Sophia for control over the power he stole from her and enclosed in Adam was early and widespread enough to be adapted to the purposes of various contemporary groups—including the author(s) of the *Apocryphon of John*—in the second half of the second century.

3. *The Date of the* Apocryphon of John

The shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John* seems to have resulted from a combination of Irenaeus' "Barbeloite" theogony with an anthropogonical narrative based on Genesis 2-9 similar to that of Irenaeus' "Ophites." But it has been supplemented by the "Sethite" supreme Father-Mother-Child trinity of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, and divine child—which possibly replaces an older trinity of First Man (the Father), Second Man (perhaps the heavenly Adam as son of Man), and First Woman (the Holy Spirit)—as well as by the negative theology of the Invisible Spirit, and the story of the heavenly archetypes of Adam, Eve, Seth and his seed residing in the Four Luminaries. The Mother who presides over the struggle with Sophia's son Yaldabaoth concerning the fate of humanity is now identified as Barbelo rather than Sophia. The entire work was Christianized by substituting Christ for the Autogenes, who is demoted from the supreme trinity to reside with (Piger-)Adamas in the highest of the Four Luminaries, and by conceiving the whole as a revelation delivered during the final manifestation of the Mother in the form of an epiphany of the exalted Christ in dialogue with his disciple John.

One may accordingly conjecture that the shorter recension (BG and NHC III), including the short excursus on the destiny of various sorts of souls (BG 64,9-71,2) came into existence around 150 CE in the form of a dialogue between the resurrected Christ and his disciple John, son of Zebedee There is no reason to doubt that the shorter version found in NHC III and in the Berlin Codex precedes the longer version found in Codices II and IV.[11] The longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* in Codices II and IV was created basically by the addition of the extended angelic melothesia of the earthly Adam's material body (claimed to derive from a "book of Zoroaster," II 15,29-19,11), and the inclusion of the Pronoia monologue (II 30,11-31,25) at the end of the work, and may have been completed by the last quarter of the second century.

11. Although M. TARDIEU (*Écrits gnostiques: Codex de Berlin* [Sources gnostiques et manichéennes 1; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1984], 38-46) maintains that the version in Codex III and BG 8502 is a scholiast's abridgment (by deletion of the Book of Zoroaster citation in II 15,20-19,10 and the Pronoia monologue in II 30,11-31,25, ca. 225) of an earlier redaction (i.e., the longer versions of Codices II and IV, ca. 200) that had expanded the original work (ca. 170) by the addition of hymnic materials (in honor of Pronoia/Epinoia as the luminous savior) from the Johannine school.

B. The *Trimorphic Protennoia*

It has been suggested now several times that the Pronoia monologue concluding the *Apocryphon of John* may have served as the initial inspiration and perhaps the direct source for the original composition of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, which exhibits precisely the same tripartite structure.

1. The Redactional Stages of the Trimorphic Protennoia

The extant version of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* consists of three separate sub-treatises,[12] each depicting a successive salvific descent of the divine First Thought, but further analysis detects a more complex structure that reveals a multistage history of composition and redaction.

The underlying basis of each sub-treatise is a long series of consistently first person aretalogical self-predications (Greek ἐγώ εἰμι), which have been expanded by the addition of other traditional materials, such as certain liturgical fragments and other third person narrative material. They seem to have been originally structured as an introductory first-person aretalogy identifying Protennoia as the divine First Thought (XIII 35,1-32a), followed by three more first-person aretalogies of about forty lines apiece in the same style, the second and third of which presently form the second and third sub-tractates of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Following the introduction, the three subsequent aretalogies made the following points: 1) Protennoia is the Voice (Coptic ϩⲣⲟⲟⲩ = Greek φθόγγος or ἦχος) of the divine First Thought who initially descended as light into the darkness and gave shape to her fallen members (XIII 35,32b-36,27a; 40,29b-41,1a); 2) Protennoia is the Speech (Coptic ⲥⲙⲏ = Greek φωνή) of the First Thought who descended a second time to empower her fallen members by giving them spirit or breath (XIII 42,4-27a; 45,2b-12a; 45,21-46,3); and 3) Protennoia is the Word (λόγος) of the First Thought who has descended for a third and final time in the likeness of the various powers to proclaim the Five Seals and restore her members into the Light (XIII 46,5-7a; 47,5-23; 49,6-22a; perhaps 50,9b-20).

Thereafter, the author or a subsequent redactor has expanded this tripartite aretalogy by means of six didactic third-person narratives

12. Entitled "The Discourse of Protennoia: [One]," "[On] Fate: [Two]," and "The Discourse of the Appearance: Three."

(XIII 36,27b-40,29a; 41,1b-42,2; 42,27b-45,2a; 46,7b-47,top; 48,top-49,top; 49,22b-50,9a). The second, third and fifth of these doctrinal insertions are designated as "mysteries" which Protennoia is said to have communicated to the sons of the light. Besides these insertions, which have the character of traditional sources, the author or a later redactor has also added a good deal of editorial material of his or her own invention.

The first narrative (XIII 36,27b-40,29a) is a traditional Barbeloite account of the generation of Autogenes Son, his anointing as the Christ, and his establishing of the Four Luminaries. The lowest of these, Eleleth, emits his Epinoia (who seems to be identified with Sophia) to produce the Archigenetor Yaldabaoth, who steals the Epinoia's power to create the lower aeons and mankind. The narrative concludes with the restoration of Epinoia who is regarded as completely innocent of fault. It is constructed in third person narrative and consists of material common to all four versions of the *Apocryphon of John* and to the Barbeloite theogony and cosmogony reported in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29.[13] This common material may therefore represent the content of the earliest reconstructable version of the *Apocryphon of John*. If so, it suggests a version of the *Apocryphon* that contained no theogony describing the Invisible Spirit, the emergence of Barbelo with her triad of hypostases (Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility and Eternal Life), and the emergence of Autogenes with his triad of hypostases (Mind, Will and Word); only that part relating to the anointing of the Autogenes Christ and his establishing the Four Luminaries appears to have been present.[14]

13. In particular, the material in *the Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 37,3-20; 37,30-38,5; 38,16-40,27 narrates the same material found in the *Apocryphon of John* II 6,10-30; 7,30-8,28; 11,16-18; 13,32-14,13 and in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29.1-4.

14. Of this parallel material, *Trim. Prot.* exhibits parallels only to the following themes of the *Apocryphon of John*: the nomenclature of the divine triad Father, Mother, Son; the designation of Protennoia as Barbelo, the image of the invisible Spirit, the thrice-male, thrice-powerful, and thrice-named; the glorification and anointing of the Autogenes-Christ with the goodness of the Invisible Spirit as the one who comes from Barbelo and establishes the aeons of the Four Luminaries for a total of twelve aeons; the production of Yaldabaoth (also called Saklas or Samael) as an imperfect offspring of Sophia (called the Epinoia of the Luminary Eleleth) who stole power from her, producing aeons in the likeness of these above, ruled over Chaos and produced a man in the First Thought's likeness and boasted that he was

Trimorphic Protennoia's second narrative section is a "mystery" which relates Protennoia's descent into the underworld to destroy the prison and the bonds by which the lower powers hold fast her fallen members, a veritable harrowing of hell. This metaphorical description of detachment from fleshly existence employs language very similar to that found in many of the traditional Nekyias, or descents of heroes into the underworld.[15] This mystery is announced in direct discourse to a second-person plural audience (XIII 41,1b-42,2).

The third narrative (XIII 42,27b-45,2a), presently in the second subtractate, is called the "mystery of the (end of) this Age" (XIII 42,28), and is addressed to a similar group in the second person plural. It offers an apocalyptic announcement of the end of the old age and the dawn of the new age with the judgment of the authorities of chaos, the Archigenetor and his celestial powers who control the lots of Fate. This announcement contains a dialogue between the terrified powers and their Archigenetor, neither of whom recognize the source of the Voice that is shattering their control over the cosmos. The provenance of this material seems indeterminate, but it makes use of the Graeco-Egyptian astrological doctrine of the Lots of Fate and planetary Domiciles (Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblios* 1.17,37; 2.121,13-27).

The fourth narrative passage is a lengthy third-person doctrinal treatment of the relation of the Word to the other two modalities (Voice, Speech) of Protennoia, and ends with an announcement of Protennoia's intention to reveal more mysteries (XIII 46,7b-47,top).

The fifth narrative passage (XIII 48,top-49,top) announces yet another mystery, called "the mystery of Gnosis" (XIII 48,33b-34a). It is addressed in the first person singular to a second person plural audience, now called the "brethren." It narrates the final descent of Protennoia as the Word who descends incognito through the various levels of the cosmic powers and strips away the corporeal and psychic thought from her brethren, replacing it by a shining light. This narrative also contains a striking fragment (48,15-35) from the liturgy of the baptismal/enthronement ritual known as the Five Seals; it portrays five successive stages of enlightenment: investiture, baptism, enthronement, glorification, and rapture into the Light.[16]

Finally, the sixth narrative passage (XIII 49,22b-50,9a) explains the ordinances of the father in terms of the names bestowed in the course of

God alone; and lastly Sophia's restoration into the light Eleleth as her dwelling place.

On the other hand, *Trim. Prot.* does not exhibit the negative and positive description of the Invisible Spirit, nor the following themes common to the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29 such as: the production of Ennoia-Barbelo; the triads of hypostases granted both to Barbelo (Prognosis, Aphtharsia, Aionia Zôê) and to the Autogenes-Christ (Nous, Thelema, Logos); the association of Christ with Aletheia; the co-operation of pairs of these triads of hypostases in the production of the Four Luminaries and their attendant hypostases (whose nomenclature is completely different); the production of Adamas, Seth and his seed (from Prognosis and Nous) and their establishment in the Four Luminaries; Sophia's explicit production of Yaldabaoth without permission of her consort; the detailed cataloguing of Yaldabaoth's aeons, angels and powers; nor the voice from heaven announcing the existence of the Man and Son of Man.

15. See Homer, *Iliad* VIII.14; Hesiod, *Theogony* 735-744; 807-812; Plato, *Republic* X 614E-F and *Phaedo* 111C-113C, Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.548-625, *Oracula Sibyllina II*.227-228, and the Apocalypses of Elijah and Peter (Achmim fragment), *passim*. See also the striking parallel language of *Odes of Solomon* 17,8-15 (Harris-Mignana): "I opened the doors that were closed./ And I broke in pieces the bars of iron;/ But my own iron melted and dissolved before me./...And I went over all my bondsmen to loose them/ That I might not leave any man bound or binding./ And I imparted my knowledge without grudging/... And I sowed my fruits in hearts/ And I transformed them through myself;/ And they received my blessing and lived./ And they were gathered to me and were saved,/ Because they were to me as my own members,/ And I was their head." This is exactly the mission which Protennoia as Voice performs on her first saving descent. Cf. also *Odes of Solomon* 24,1-5 where the Voice of the dove frightens "the inhabitants" and opens the hidden abysses, which seems similar to the effect of Protennoia's second descent, and generally P.-H. POIRIER, "La 'Prôtennoia trimorphe' (NH XIII, 1) et le vocabulaire du 'Descensus ad inferos'," *Le Muséon* 96 (1983), 193-204.

16. Cf. Lucius' initiation into the mysteries of Isis in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* XI.22-24. See now J.-M. SEVRIN, *Le dossier baptismal séthien: Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Études » 2; Québec: Université Laval, 1986) hereafter cited as *Le dossier baptismal séthien*. In Ch 2, Sevrin considers this sequence to reflect an older baptismal ritual (now best attested in *Gos. Egypt.*) which has become spiritualized (especially by the addition of glorification and rapture, which seem to him to have no ritual basis), but thinks it improbable that investiture should precede baptism. In *Trim. Prot.* these five stages are only an interpretation of successive stages of spiritual awareness, culminating in the reception of Gnosis; they are merely a sequence of five groups of "names" to be invoked (cf. XIII 49,28-32) and by which one is "sealed" or protected from a hostile material and spiritual environment; they do not reflect a sequence of five ritual actions. The older ritual presupposed may have involved a quintuple immersion in water, which might be the ritual basis of the number five in the "Five Seals," or possibly the number five has something to do with the successive sealing of each of the five senses from worldly attachments.

the baptismal ritual; they will guard Protennoia's members from the powers of the Archons until she gathers them into her eternal kingdom, presumably upon their natural death.

It is clear from the preceding that the *Trimorphic Protennoia* has been secondarily Christianized. Three glosses identifying the Autogenes Son with Christ in the first subtractate (XIII 37,[31]; 38,22; 39,6-7) probably derive from the traditional theogonical materials common to the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29, upon which the author has drawn for the first narrative insertion. But in the third subtractate the situation is much different, and seems to suggest that the *Trimorphic Protennoia* has undergone three stages of composition.

First, there was the triad of aretalogical ἐγώ εἰμι self-predications of Protennoia as Voice, Speech and Word. Second, this was combined with third-person narrative material: a traditional Barbeloite cosmogony similar to that of the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29; apparently non-Sethian traditional materials treating the harrowing of hell and the eschatological overthrow of the celestial powers; and again a traditional Barbeloite account of the baptismal ascent ritual called the Five Seals. Third, after circulation as a Sethian tractate in this form, the final stage of composition seems to have been the incorporation of Christian materials into the concluding portion of the third subtractate.

The third and last stage of composition seems to have involved a deliberately polemical incorporation of Christian, specifically Johannine Christological materials into the aretalogical portion of the third subtractate, which relates the narrative of the incognito descent of Protennoia as Word, hidden in the forms of the Sovereignties, Powers and Angels, culminating in the final revelation of herself in her members below. In XIII 47,14-15, it is said that as Logos, Protennoia revealed herself to "them" (i.e. humans?) "in their tents" as the Word (cf. Jn 1:14). In XIII 49,7-8, it is said that the Archons thought Protennoia-Logos was "their Christ," while actually she is the "Father of everyone." In XIII 49,11-15, Protennoia identifies herself as the "beloved" (of the Archons), since she clothed herself as Son of the Archigenetor until the end of his ignorant decree. In XIII 49,18-20, Protennoia reveals herself as a Son of Man among the Sons of Man even though she is the Father of everyone. In XIII 50, 6-9, Protennoia will reveal herself to her "brethren" and gather them into her "eternal kingdom." In XIII 50,12-16, Protennoia has put on Jesus and borne him aloft from the cursed—thus non-redemptive—cross into his Father's dwelling places (cf. Jn 14:2-3). One might assign this final stage to the period of struggle over the interpretation of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel witnessed by the NT letters of John, perhaps the middle of the second century.

In this way, traditional Christological titles such as Christ, Beloved, Son of God ("Son of the Archigenetor") and Son of Man are polemically interpreted in a consciously docetic fashion. By implication, the "orthodox" Christ of the apostolic church is shown to be the Christ of the "Sethian" Archons; the "orthodox" Beloved is the beloved of the Archons; the "orthodox" Son of God is the "Sethian" son of the ignorant Archigenetor; and the "orthodox" Son of Man is only a human among the sons of men. For the "Sethians," however, the true Son of Man is Adamas, the Son of the Supreme deity Man (the human form in which the deity revealed himself as in the *Apocryphon of John* II 14,14-24, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 59,1-9) or else Seth, the Son of Adamas (the *Apocryphon of John* II 24,32-25,7). Therefore, the Protennoia-Logos is in reality the Father of everyone, the Father of the All who only *appears* as the Logos "in their tents."[17] In contrast to the traditional view of Jn 1:14, the Logos *appeared* in the "likeness of their shape" but did not become flesh as the "orthodox" believe. In only disguising himself as the "orthodox" Christ, the Logos indeed had to rescue Jesus from the "cursed" (not redemptive!) cross and restore him to the "dwelling places of his Father." In what seems a conscious reference to Jn 14:2-3, Jesus did not prepare a place for his followers; instead, the Logos, invisible to the celestial powers who watch over the aeonic dwellings (i.e. the Four Luminaries?), installs Jesus into his Father's dwelling place (XIII 50,12-16; perhaps in the Light Oroiael as in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 65,16-17). Some of these polemical Sethian reinterpretations of "orthodox" Christology in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* seem to depend on key texts from the Gospel of John in order to score their point in any acute fashion, although this has been a matter of scholarly dispute.

17. "Tents" (σκηνή) may be a gloss on "the likeness of their shape" in XIII 47,16 in what seems to be conscious opposition to ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν of Jn 1:14. However, the concept of tenting may have been part of the Logos theology of the original aretalogy; cf. Sirach 24:8-10: τότε ἐνετείλατό μοι ὁ κτίστης ἁπάντων, καὶ ὁ κτίσας με κατέπαυσεν τὴν σκηνήν μου καὶ εἶπεν Ἐν Ἰακωβ κατασκήνωσον καὶ ἐν Ἰσραηλ κατακληρονομήθητι.

Throughout, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* displays what appear to be redactional bridging passages and certain glosses that connect all the foregoing together into a whole. They seem to derive from the author's own hand, rather than to belong either to inherited traditional material or to the basic first person aretalogy.[18] The editorial passages can be expected to reveal the direct interests of the author, who must be Sethian, since the traditional materials he incorporates are in large part Sethian, as are the motifs in the editorial passages. The author emphasizes the threeness of Protennoia who has three names and consists of three μοναί, "permanences," which give the universe its foundation (XIII 46,10-33).[19] First, from the silent Thought (Protennoia) proceeds the Voice. Second, from the Voice proceeds the Speech of the Voice (both unintelligible to the hostile powers and their Archigenetor). From the Speech, which is perceptible and which brings in the shift of the ages and debilitates the powers, issues the Word, which is the focus or "eye" of the three permanences. As the Word, Protennoia descends into the "world of mortals" to rescue her fallen members or "Spirit" stolen by the Archigenetor from the innocent Sophia (who therefore need not repent of anything). As Voice, Speech, and Word, Protennoia descends to speak four mysteries to her "brethren" (addressed in the second person plural) so as to loosen their bonds, and to effect the end of the old age and the dawn of the new age which is unchanging. In these forms Protennoia encounters the Powers and their Archigenetor who recognize

18. The editorial passages are best identified by a shift in grammatical person and number from the first person singular of the basic aretalogies to the third person singular or plural or even to the first person plural (XIII 36,33-37,3; 44,23-24 both involving baptismal motifs) or second person plural (XIII 40,34-41,4; 42,17-31; 44,29-45,2; 46,33-47,9; and probably 48,35-49,top, all passages introducing and concluding the passages in which Protennoia proclaims the eschatological and baptismal mysteries). They are as follows:

In the first subtractate: XIII 35,6-7, a gloss on the triple name of Protennoia; 36,1-3, a gloss identifying the Silence surrounding Protennoia's members with the secret Voice indwelling her; 36,15-16, a gloss on the innate recognition of Protennoia's Voice by her members; 36,33-37,3, the Voice mediates the hidden wisdom which separates "us" from the world and which puts its Fruit into the Living Water (a baptismal motif); 37,3-20, the origination of the Son (Christ) who has the Name in him and is the Word from the Voice which is revealed to those in darkness; 36,20-30, on the numerology of Protennoia's triform nature as Voice, Speech and Word; 37,33-38,3, the establishment of the Autogenes Son Protennoia's Living Water/Light (baptismal motif); 40,8-18, Protennoia descends to the world of mortals for the sake of her portion left in it from the innocent, conquered Sophia (cf. 47,30-34); 40,25-29, Yaldabaoth's making of man is the decree of his annulment (an eschatological motif); 40,34-41,4 introduces the mystery of the loosening of bonds in the underworld (an eschatological motif—note the second person plural); 41,21-24, identification of Protennoia's members with the Spirit originating from the Living Water now dwelling in the soul, with whom she speaks out of immersion in the mysteries (a baptismal motif).

In the second subtractate: XIII 42,21-25, the age (aeon) to come is identified with the Aeons from which Protennoia revealed herself in masculine form and in which "we" shall be purified (an eschatological and baptismal motif—note the first person and second person plural); 44,3-4, a gloss on the relation of the Speech to the Voice; perhaps 43,27-44,19 & 44,27-29, the unintelligibility of the Voice to the Powers and their Archigenetor, leading to their consequent destruction (an eschatological motif); 44,29-45,2, summary and conclusion of the mystery "hidden from the ages" (cf. I Cor 2:7) concerning the end of the old age and the dawn of the new (an eschatological motif—note second person plural); 45,9-10, a gloss on the Voice as Meirothea; 45,12-20, an anticipatory invitation to participate in the rite of the Five Seals presented in 48,15-35.

In the third subtractate: XIII 46,10-36, the Word is Living Fruit, the focus ("eye") of the three μοναί (i.e. the Word which comes from the Speech which comes from the Voice, all "foundations" which come from the Thought or "Silence"), and pours forth Living Water from its source, the Voice (a baptismal motif): 47,24-28, the Powers in whom Protennoia is hidden until she reveals herself to her "brethren" do not recognize her or their origin; 47,29-34 the "brethren" comprise the "Spirit" left in the world by the *innocent* Sophia (cf. 40,11-18); 48,6-14, Protennoia shares with "him" the Living Water that strips off the somatic and psychic thought, replacing chaos with Light (a baptismal motif); 48,30-35, the conclusion of the "mystery of Gnosis" (a baptismal motif); 48,35-49,6, the beginning of a paraenesis (perhaps originally in the second person plural); 49,22-50,9, the "brethren" are informed that the ordinances of the Father are the "Five Seals of these particular names" which strip away ignorance and replace it with Light, causing darkness and Chaos to dissolve (a baptismal motif).

19. See the triadic terminology in the *Apocryphon of John* II 5,8-9: "thrice-male, thrice-powerful, thrice-named androgynous one". These μοναί are taken by most interpreters to signify the three "dwellings" symbolized by the three rectangles drawn in XIII 37,28, and thus recall the "dwellings" which Christ prepares for believers in Jn 14:2-3. In my opinion, the meaning is much closer to the first term in the μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή triad in Neoplatonism, where μονή stands for the absolute being, in the proper sense, of any hypostasis. Actually, the dwellings of *Trim. Prot.* parallel to Jn 14:2-3 are mentioned in XIII 50,12-16. Cf. G. SCHENKE, "Die dreigestaltige Protennoia (Nag-Hammadi-Codex XIII) herausgegeben und kommentiert" (Dr. theol. dissertation, Rostock, 1972), fascicle 2, 36 n. 2 (now TU 132; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1984); Y. JANSSENS, *La Prôtennoia Trimorphe (NH XIII, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 4; Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1978) 62 and correctly J. M. ROBINSON, "Sethians and Johannine Thought: The *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Prologue of the Gospel of John," in *Rediscovery* 2.643-662, esp. 656-658.

neither her Voice nor her Speech. On the third descent as Word, Protennoia reveals the ordinances of the Father to be the Five Seals, interpreted in Sethian language as a baptismal mystery of celestial ascent.

The three compositional stages of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* are summarized in the following table. There was first (A) the original triptych of aretalogical self-predications of Protennoia as Voice, Speech and Word that were probably built up out of the Jewish wisdom tradition and maybe out of the Pronoia monologue some time during the first century CE before its inclusion in the *Apocryphon of John*; there is little here that seems specifically gnostic or Christian or Sethian or Barbeloite. Next, (B) this was supplemented, whether by the same or a different author, by various narrative doctrinal passages, of which three are called "mysteries," and at least one based upon traditional Barbeloite theogonical materials similar to those of the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29. One may also assign this first major redaction of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* to the first quarter of the second century. After circulation as a mildly Christianized Barbeloite text in this form, a third stage of composition (C) resulted in incorporating Christological materials in a specifically polemical way, perhaps in the context of the struggle over the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel reflected in the Johannine epistles during the second quarter of the second century.

ORIGINAL DOCUMENT	LATER ADDITIONS		
A	**Second, "Barbeloite Redaction" B**		
Original First-Person Aretalogy	Doctrinal Passages	Explicitly Baptismal Passages	Christological Passages
↓	↓	↓	↓
First Subtractate 35,1-32a (introduction) 35,32b-36,27a (Voice)		36,5b-7a	Christological glosses (inherited from Barbeloite cosmology)
	36,27b-40,29a (cosmology)	37,1b-3a; 37,35	37,[31];38,22;39,6-7
40,29b-41,1a (Voice)			
	First Mystery 41,1b-42,2 (harrowing)	41,21b-24a	
Second Subtractate 42,4-27a (Speech)		(42,22-23?)	
	Second Mystery		
45,2b-12a (Speech)	42,27b-45,2a (eschatology)	45,12b-20	
45,21-46,3 (Speech)			
Third Subtractate 46,5-7a (Word)			**Third Redaction C** Christological Polemic
	46,7b-47,top (the Word)	46,16-19a	
47,5-23 (Word, etc.)	*Third Mystery*		
	48,top-49,top (Five Seals)	48,top-48,35 49,26b-34a	
49,6-22a (Word)	49,22b-50,9a (the ordinances of the father)		49,7b-8a; 49,11b-15a 49,18b-20a
50,9b-20			50,10b-16a

2. *The* Trimorphic Protennoia *and Johannine Christianity*

Many scholars have called attention to the various parallels that the *Trimorphic Protennoia* shares with the Fourth Gospel and especially its prologue.[20] Since any reconstruction of Sethianism must account for its

20. See the discussions of G. SCHENKE in her 1977 dissertation, "Die dreigestaltige Protennoia," 154-158; J. HELDERMAN, "'In irhen Zelten ...': Bemerkungen zu Codex XIII Nag Hammadi p. 47:14-18 in Hinblick auf Joh. i 14," in *Miscellanea Neotestamentica I (25th Ann. Studiorum Novi Testamenti Conventus)*

interaction with Christianity, the possible relations between the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the community behind the Johannine writings deserve further comment in the light of the three stages of redactional history here proposed.

At the time of its initial composition, that is, at the first of the three proposed compositional stages, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* was a product of non-Christian Barbeloite wisdom speculation. The theme of the triple descent of Protennoia was derived from a source similar to or identical with the Pronoia monologue concluding the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John*. The Logos theology of its tripartite aretalogy of Protennoia drew upon a fund of oriental speculation on the divine Word and Wisdom as did the prologue of the Gospel of John in a similar but

(Supplements to *Novum Testamentum* 47; Leiden: Brill, 1978), 181-211; H.-M. SCHENKE. "Gnostic Sethianism," 607-612; and summarizing the debate, J. M. ROBINSON, "Sethians and Johannine Thought," in *Rediscovery* 2, 644-662. For further discussion, see Chapter 7 (esp. n. 15 for literature) on the relation between Sethian and Johannine Christianity. My own position is that *Trim. Prot.* underwent superficial Christianization in its second stage of redaction, but specific and polemical Christianization in its third stage of redaction. The superficial resemblances to the Johannine prologue scattered throughout *Trim. Prot.* are to be explained by the emergence of both texts from gnosticizing oriental sapiential traditions at home in first-century Syria and Palestine, as suggested by C. COLPE, "Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi III," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 17 (1974), 109-125, esp. 122-124; cf. Y. JANSSENS, "Une source gnostique du Prologue?" in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridium Theologicarum Lovaniensium 44; Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1977), 355-358. The Christological glosses in the first two subtractates are to be explained by the influence of the theogonical section of the *Apocryphon of John*. Yet the more striking parallels between the third subtractate and the Gospel of John discussed here, as well as the explicit application of apparent Christological titles to Protennoia-Logos, seem to me to constitute deliberate "Christianization," but in a strictly polemical vein. Whether the redactor of the third compositional stage hypothesized by me is really Sethian or heterodox Christian is impossible to tell. In any case he is certainly not an "orthodox" or "apostolic" Christian, though perhaps he might be a "hyper-Johannine" (heretic) of the sort described in the First Letter of John as certain docetically-inclined Christians who deny that Jesus came in the flesh and have now "gone out from among us." See R. E. BROWN, "Johannine Ecclesiology—The Community's Origins," *Interpretation* 31 (1977), 379-393; *IDEM*, "'Other Sheep not of this Fold': The Johannine perspective On Christian Diversity in the Late First Century," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978), 5-22, and *IDEM*, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

independent way.[21] The creative act of the original author of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* was an interpretation of the sequence of Protennoia's successive revelatory descents according to a theory of the increasing articulateness of verbal communication as one moves from unintelligible sound through articulate speech to explicit word, probably of Stoic provenance.[22] Protennoia's power manifests itself as utterance or articulate speech; not through a theophany, but through a "*theophony*." Salvation derives not only through knowledge or vision but also through sound and audition. Throughout the revelatory discourses Protennoia is manifested successively as silent thought, audible sound or voice, uttered speech, and finally as the fully articulate Logos; she is the "Logos existing in the Silence," a "hidden Sound," the "ineffable Logos."[23] This conceptuality is surely derived from the Stoic distinction between internal reason (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and uttered or expressed reason (λόγος προφορικός).

Subsequently, both the prologue and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* underwent Christianization in a further stage of redaction, the prologue in Johannine Christian circles when it was adopted by the evangelist, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* in Christianized Sethian circles during the second compositional stage I have described.[24] Thus, while the *Trimor-*

21. C. COLPE, "Heidnische, jüdische und christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi III," *Jarbuch für Antike und Christentum* 17 (1974), 109-124, esp. 122-124.

22. Cf. the sequence φονή, λέξις, λόγος in Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* VII.57.

23. One may note the similar characterization of the revealer in *The Thunder: Perfect Mind*: "I am the silence that is incomprehensible and the idea whose remembrance is frequent. I am the voice whose sound is manifold and the word whose appearance is multiple. I am the utterance of my name" (VI 14,9-15); "Hear me, you hearers and learn of my words, you who know me. I am the hearing that is attainable to everything; I am the speech that cannot be grasped. I am the name of the sound and the sound of the name. I am the sign of the letter and the designation of the division. And I will speak [his name]" (VI 20,26-35).

24. *Trim. Prot.* must have undergone a Christianizing redaction in the environment of the debate over the interpretation of the Gospel of John during the early second century. This debate is reflected in the Johannine letters and a bit later in western Valentinian circles concerned with the interpretation of the Logos (e.g. the *Tripartite Tractate* of NHC I) and of the Gospel of John (e.g. Ptolemaeus in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.8.5 and the Fragments of Heracleon). It seems likely that the Valentinians were aware of some version of the *Apocryphon of John* upon which the *Trimorphic Protennoia* draws heavily, which at least in part is concerned with the relationship of Christ to the Father (e.g. II 1,21-25; 2,9-25; 6,10-9,25; and 23,26-31,

phic Protennoia identified Protennoia's appearance as Logos with the Christ who established the Four Luminaries and redeemed Jesus from the cross, the author of the Fourth Gospel contrasted Christ's appearance as the fully articulate Logos with John the Baptist's appearance as a mere voice crying in the wilderness.

The similarity of the first doctrinal section (XIII 36,27b-40,29) of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* to the theogonical section of the *Apocryphon of John* suggests that the second compositional stage of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* is contemporary with the creation of the shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John*, which might be assigned to the second quarter of the second century, since the theogony and cosmogony it shares with the shorter version is clearly expounded by Irenaeus around 175 to 180 C. E. The second—Christian—compositional stage of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* likely appeared around then, about a generation after the Fourth Gospel.

The third and final polemical redaction of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* seems to have been accomplished by Christian Sethians who wished to demonstrate a higher, more spiritual interpretation of Christ than that espoused by the apostolic Church. The thrust of this redaction is to show that the Logos in his incognito descent fooled everyone except his congenital members who recognized him. The theme of mutual recognition between the revealer and his own is also frequent in the Johannine literature (Jn 1:12-14; 10:1-4, 14; 14:20; 17:2-23; 1 Jn 2:3-5; 3:24; 4:6,13; 5:19-20). The polemical implication in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* seems to be that he even fooled the leaders of the wider, "apostolic" Church, whom the redactor conceived as ignorant lackeys of the Archon who thought that the Logos was their Christ, and that he was the Son of the ignorant Archon. By way of contrast with the Gospel of John, the Logos was no Son of Man who was lifted up and glorified on the cross, going to prepare a place for the believers; instead, the Logos descended to rescue Jesus from the cursed cross, thus allowing him to be raised up free of the grasp of the ignorant creator God and to be established in the aeonic dwellings of his true Father, the Invisible Spirit. And the *Trimorphic Protennoia* is clear on a point at which the author of the Fourth Gospel is ambiguous: indeed the Logos did come to confer a baptism, not a baptism merely conferring the Spirit (as in the Fourth Gospel), but

which presupposes the redactional addition of the Pronoia monologue in 30,11-31,25).

the truly effective one enabling rapture into the Light (cf. Jn 3:5: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"). By means of the baptism of the Five Seals, Protennoia's congenital members could be immediately transported into the realm of the true Father's light, rather than depending upon the Johannine savior to "draw all people" (Jn 3:14; 8:22; 12:32-34) to him.

Although Christianized, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* does not thereby become Christian in any orthodox sense, but may have been used by Sethian Christians either as an *apologia* against Christian opponents or even as a proselytizing instrument. It recommends to its readers an extremely high—and by implication superior—Christological interpretation of the Johannine wisdom Christology than do, say, the first two Letters of John, with their insistence on the incarnation and crucifixion.

III. 150-175+ CE: SETHIAN-CHRISTIAN POLEMIC

A. The *Apocalypse of Adam*

It has been suggested that the *Apocryphon of John* originated in the mid-second century as the result of a redactional combination of a theogony centered on the salvific role of the divine mother Barbelo with a version of the Sethian history of salvation derived from exegesis of Genesis 1-6. Shortly thereafter, a longer version of this work was created, in part by the addition of the concluding Pronoia monologue reciting the Mother's three descents into the lower world, the same monologue that served as the basis for the composition of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. In like fashion, it may be that around the same time, the *Apocalypse of Adam* may have reached its present form as the redactional combination of the two sources hypothesized by C. W. Hedrick: source A, a Genesis-inspired protological account of the flood, the destiny of Noah's sons, and the celestial salvation of certain offspring of Ham and Japheth from the universal conflagration, and source B, Adam's prophecy to Seth about the third manifestation of a Spirit-laden male figure called the "Illuminator of Gnosis," who was glorified and empowered and came upon "the waters."[25] At the same time, the redac-

25. C. W. HEDRICK, "The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1972), 581-590, and more fully, IDEM, *The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 46; Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1980), 202-208.

tor also incorporated Sethian baptismal tradition (V 84,4-85,18; 85,22-31), but in a polemical way, opposing it to certain forms of water baptism regarded as one of the creator God's tools of enslavement.

As the *Apocalypse of Adam* presently stands, the offspring of Shem and most of the progeny of Ham and Japheth are considered to be sinful Sethites who are infected with the same evil that had affected the much earlier generation of Cain (who originated from the archontic rape of Eve but were destroyed by the flood), since they subscribe to Noah's pledge of fealty to the archon Saklas. They will go on to form the "twelve kingdoms" of Israel whose seed will enter into the thirteenth kingdom of "another people" (i.e., the Christian Church), all thirteen of which fail to recognize the incognito appearances of the Illuminator and thus defile the "water of life" by confusing his final advent with a merely human figure who originates from a carnal, procreative birth and undergoes a baptism in mere water (e.g., Jesus). On the other hand, the pure race of Seth is to be found only among 400,000 "great men" from the offspring of Ham and Japheth, who reject Saklas' dominion and instead "enter another land and sojourn with those men who came forth from the great eternal knowledge" (i.e., with the heavenly seed of the heavenly Seth; V 73,16-20). These latter are the "kingless generation" who have recognized the Illuminator's incognito descents (at the flood, the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the final judgment of the archons) and now receive his name (Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus) upon the true living water in the holy baptism of knowledge.

Source B begins at the point where source A told of the removal of the antediluvian seed of Seth from the world at the time of the conflagration that destroyed their haven (Sodom and Gomorrah), leaving only the descendants of Noah in the lines of Shem (the Jews), Ham, and Japheth (the Gentiles), bereft of the saving knowledge that had disappeared with the seed of Seth. Hedrick thinks that the redactor introduced source B concerning the advent of the Illuminator to explain how the saving knowledge possessed by the Sethites could be made available to his own later generation descended from the 400,000 morally pure descendants of Ham and Japheth; it was reintroduced by the illuminator at his third descent to overthrow the regime of the evil powers in the end-time. For Christianity, the period from Adam to

Source A: V 64,1-65,23; 66,12-67,12; 67,22-29; 69,1-76,6; 83,7-84,3; 85,19-22,32; Source B: V 65,24-66,12; 67,12-21; 76,8-83,4.

Christ was only a preparatory prelude to the advent of true salvation in Christ, while for the Sethians, salvation had been in principle already achieved in primordial times, with the raising of Seth and his seed into the Aeon at the time of the flood and of their progeny again at the time of the conflagration. Thus the third descent of the redeemer serves to remind the earthly Sethians of—and to re-present—the salvation that had been accomplished for their ancestors at the time of the redeemer's two prior primordial descents.

For Sethian texts such as the Pronoia monologue, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, this salvation was conferred through the baptismal ascent ritual of the Five Seals that was practiced by most of Sethian Gnostics. But for the redactor of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the saving gnosis was not to be received in the context of such a water baptism. According to the extant text, it might appear that the redactor numbered even Micheus, Michar and Mnesinous, the traditional Sethian figures that "preside over the living water," among the servants of the lower powers who pollute the Water of Life by placing it under the will of the powers and divulging secret knowledge in written form (V 84,4-85,18), but clearly this passage must be emended to read as an accusation *by* Micheus, Michar and Mnesinous against others who pollute the waters.[26] The true descendants of Seth will fight against the

26. The truly vexing problem here is the role accorded Micheus, Michar and Mnesinous who here and in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Zostrianos*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and Codex Bruce, *Untitled* preside over the living water of the holy baptism or the spring of truth. According to the natural reading of the *Apocalypse of Adam* V 84,4-10, these unambiguously positive Sethian baptismal figures are accused of polluting the celestial water of baptism:

V 84 [4] ⲧⲟⲧⲉ ⲁⲩⲥⲙⲏ ϣⲱⲡⲉ ϣⲁⲣⲟⲩ [5] ⲉⲥⲭⲱ ⲙ̄ⲙⲟⲥ ⲭⲉ ⲙ̄ⲓⲭⲉⲩ ⲙ̄ⲛ [6] ⲙ̄ⲓⲭⲁⲣ ⲙ̄ⲛ ⲙ̄ⲏⲥⲓⲛⲟⲩⲥ · ⲛⲏ [7] ⲉⲧ̀ϩⲓⲛ̄ ⲡⲓⲭⲱⲕ̄ⲙ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ [8] ⲙ̄ⲛ ⲡⲓⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲟⲛ̄ϩ ⲭⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ [9] ⲟⲩ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲧ̄ⲛⲱⲱϥ ⲟⲩⲃⲉ ⲡⲛⲟⲩ [10] ⲧⲉ ⲉⲧⲟⲛ̄ϩ ϩⲛ̄ ϩ[ⲉ]ⲛⲥⲙⲏ ⲛ̄ⲁⲛⲟⲙⲟⲥ

V 84 [4] Then a voice came to them [5] saying: Micheus and [6] Michar and Mnesinous, [7] who are over the holy baptism [8] and the living water, why [9] are you crying out against [10] the living God with lawless voices...

They are then scolded for foul deeds, laughter, polluting the Water of Life and serving the will of the lower powers. Since this is a charge that parallels the immediately preceding self-condemnation of the evil offspring of Noah, it seems applicable only to those persons who have been hostile toward the Sethians. It is highly unlikely that this could include these three baptists. As various scholars have suspected, the names of the three baptizers are likely a gloss introduced by ⲭⲉ functioning in a way similar to ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲡⲉ, identifying the celestial voice as

power of those who "receive his name upon the water" (V 83,4-7) in an ordinary water baptism of the sort they supposed to have marked the coming of their savior; true salvation is based on the receipt of knowledge through a baptism, not in mere water, but in gnosis through the "logos-begotten ones" and the imperishable illuminators Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus, the Living Water (V 85,22-31).[27]

Hedrick's source B contains a dream vision revealed to Adam by three glorious men who narrate a third saving mission conducted by an illuminator whose origin is unknown to the evil powers. It contained a series of thirteen traditional opinions ("kingdoms") of the origin of the Illuminator that seem to have been derived from some—probably non-Sethian—baptismal liturgy in which the number thirteen was somehow significant, perhaps because the initiate descended into the water thirteen times, or because baptism enabled passage through the thirteen aeons[28] controlled by the creator god, or because they were simply representative views of pre-Sethian groups—perhaps of Jews descended from the twelve tribes and of a thirteenth Christian regime—of how the savior was born and became present in the act of baptism. The redactor regards these inherited traditions as false; the Illuminator was not born, but chosen, and his descent had nothing to do with baptism. The common pattern of these thirteen opinions is that the Illuminator receives nourishment, glory, and power in the beyond, and then "comes (down) to the water," whereupon he is recognized.[29] But since the redactor regards such earthly waters as polluted and chaotic, he rejects these opinions in favor of the view that the Illuminator originates from above, where he resides in the light with the three imperishable illuminators Yesseus, Mazareus, Yessedekeus, the Living Water, and his incognito descents are recognized only by those baptized in the living water. Such a heavenly origin for the Illuminator is clearly in keeping with the typical Sethian distinction between the earthly origin of Cain and Abel (from the Archon[s] and the carnal or psychic Eve), and the heavenly origin of Seth (from the enlightened Adam and the spiritual woman, be she called Epinoia, Zôê, or Eve).

Source B's section on the thirteen kingdoms seems to draw on an old mythical pattern that could be developed in various ways to portray the origin of mankind, the origin of the Savior, and perhaps the origin of both water baptism and celestial baptism as well. In a very illuminating article, J. M. Robinson[30] drew attention to a series of striking parallels to the structure and motifs of this section of the *Apocalypse of Adam* (V 77,26-82,19) concerning thirteen kingdoms, i.e. thirteen opinions concerning the origin of the Illuminator, to be found in the NT Apocalypse of John (Rev 12:1-17), in the baptism and "temptation" stories of Mark 1:9-13, and in some fragments from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. Working from the sequence of episodes in Revelation 12, he discovers the following parallels:

1. John of Patmos has a vision of a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head: kingdoms 3, 4, 6, 9 and 11 of *Apoc. Adam* associate a woman with the Il-

Micheus, Michar and Mnesinous: "Then a voice came to them, saying—that is, (ⲭⲉ) Micheu<s>, Michar and Mnesinous who are over the holy baptism and the living water: (ⲭⲉ): "Why are you crying out against the living God with lawless voices..." etc. See G. W. MacRae's notes to "The Apocalypse of Adam," in *Nag Hammadi Codices V, 2-3 and VI with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,1 and 4*, ed. D. M. Parrott (Nag Hammadi Studies 11; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 191; A. Böhlig, remarking in *Rediscovery* 2.557-558; H.-M. Schenke, "Gnostic Sethianism," 598 and *Orientalische Literaturzeitung* 61 (1966), 1-2; G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 102-103 and J.-M. Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien*, Ch. 4. F. Morard, "*L'Apocalypse d'Adam* de Nag Hammadi: un essai d'interprétation," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism*, ed. M. Krause (Nag Hammadi Studies 8; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 35-42 thinks the apparent reading was intended, suggesting a radical anti-baptismal polemic by a redactor who totally reevaluates the traditional Sethian baptizers; in her critical edition, *L'Apocalypse d'Adam* (NH V, 5) (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 15; Québec and Louvain: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 1985), 117-118, discusses the problem, but leaves the matter open.

27. The plural "illuminators" and "logos-begotten ones" is strange, and ought to be singular; the *Gospel of the Egyptians* identifies Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus as Jesus, the Child of the Child (III 64,10-12; 66,10-11) and the logos-begotten one as the living Jesus whose body has been put on by Seth (III 63,1-12; 64,1).

28. See the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 63,17-18; 64,3-4; *Zostrianos* VIII 4,26-28.

29. Perhaps "coming to the water" means to "become manifest" or instantiated in the phenomenal world, like the image of the archetypal man projected on the primordial waters in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* or the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*; in the *Poimandres* the archetypal man is attracted to and unites with his reflection in the reflective surface of Nature. One is reminded of catoptromantic or lecanomantic techniques in which watery surfaces and mirrors were used to attract and cause souls (usually of the dead) to appear. Cf. the "mirror of Dionysus" and *Papyri Graecae Magicae* IV.222-234.

30. J. M. Robinson, "On the *Gattung* of Mark (and John)," in *Jesus and Man's Hope* (175th Anniversary Festival on the Gospels at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary), *Perspective* 11.2 (1970), 99-129, esp. 119-129.

luminator's coming; kingdom 12 says he came from two illuminators (cf. the two φωστῆρες of Gen 1:14 LXX). Just as all 12 kingdoms of *Apoc. Adam* portray the coming of the Illuminator to the water, Mk 1:9-10 portrays three comings: Jesus comes from Galilee (not heaven) to the water of the Jordan for baptism by John; the Spirit too comes like a dove from heaven, not upon the water, but upon Jesus; and a voice from heaven comes down saying "thou art my beloved Son."[31] So also in *Gos. Hebrews*, the fount of the Holy Spirit descends and rests in the Savior at the baptism, paralleled by Sophia's seeking a resting place on earth in 1 Enoch 42,1-2 and Sirach 24.

2. Returning to Rev 12, the next episode is the pregnancy of the woman, paralleled in kingdoms 4, 6, 9 and 11 of *Apoc. Adam*.
3. The next episode is the appearance of the red dragon to devour the child upon birth, possibly paralleled by Satan or the Devil who tempts Jesus in Matt 4:1-11 par.
4. The next episode is the birth of the child, paralleled in kingdoms 4, 6, 9 and 10 of *Apoc. Adam*.
5. The fifth episode is the saving rapture of the child to God's throne, paralleled in kingdoms 1, 2 and 7 of *Apoc. Adam*. This is paralleled in the taking of the savior to Mt. Tabor by his mother the Holy Spirit in the *Gos. Hebrews*.
6. At the same time, the woman of Rev 12 flees to the wilderness, paralleled by the removal of the child to the desert in kingdoms 3, 4 and 11, or the child *and* his mother to the desert in kingdoms 3 and 4 of *Apoc. Adam*. A similar motif is found in the driving of Jesus into the wilderness by the Spirit in Mk 1:12.
7. The next episode is the three and a half year nourishing of the woman, paralleled by the nourishing of the child by angels in kingdoms 6, 8 and 11, or by a bird in heaven in kingdom 2, or by a woman in heaven in kingdom 1, or by a woman in the desert in kingdom 4, or by angels in the desert in kingdom 11 of *Apoc. Adam*. This is paralleled by ministrations to Jesus in the wilderness by angels in Mk 1:13, or by his being nourished by the bread which Satan or the Devil tempts Jesus to make in the Q temptation story of Matt 4:3 par.
8. The eighth episode, the defeat and casting down of the dragon to earth by Michael, has a possible parallel in the struggle between the armies of angels and the armies of Solomon over the virgin in kingdom 4 of *Apoc. Adam*, and in the battle between Jesus and beasts in Mk 1:13 or the Satan/Devil in the Q temptation stories.
9. The ninth episode is the coming of a voice from heaven proclaiming the advent of salvation, paralleled by the voice from heaven in Mk 1:11, and more remotely, perhaps by the glorification of the Illuminator in all but kingdom 11 in *Apoc. Adam* (specified as "Arise, God has given glory to you" in kingdom 2).

Most of the next five episodes of Revelation 12 seem to be duplications of the previous episodes:

10. The dragon, cast down to earth, pursues the woman, who
11. sprouts eagle's wings (perhaps paralleled by the bird of kingdom 2 of *Apoc. Adam*, the dove of Mk 1:10 and the lifting of the child to Mt. Tabor by a hair of his head in *Gos. Hebrews*).
12. The woman flees to the wilderness, where
13. she is nourished three and a half years.
14. At this point, the "serpent" (i.e. the dragon?) brings the flood to sweep her away (perhaps paralleled by the water upon which the Illuminator comes in all twelve kingdoms of *Apoc. Adam*), but the flood is swallowed by the earth.
15. Finally, the dragon makes war on the offspring of the woman "who keep the commandments and bear testimony to Jesus."

Most of these parallels are striking, and Robinson suggests that Revelation 12 and the *Apocalypse of Adam* shared a common tradition which the *Apocalypse of Adam* rigidified into a repetitious and stereotypical outline and which the author of Revelation Christianized. While the thirteen kingdoms of the *Apocalypse of Adam* reflect the mythical coming of the Illuminator, Revelation 12 is cast as a birth story of the Lamb of God, causing a reversal of certain motifs by comparison with the *Apocalypse of Adam*. Thus in Revelation 12 the infant is taken to

31. Robinson suggests the coming of Jesus to the Jordan is a historicizing of the mythical coming of the Spirit, and calls attention to the motif of the glorification of the Illuminator in all but the 11th kingdom of the *Apocalypse of Adam*.

heaven, reflecting the Church's doctrine of Christ's ascension, while the woman, perhaps symbolizing the martyred but militant Church, is taken to the wilderness where the serpent makes war on the rest of her offspring. In the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the child is nourished, but in Revelation 12, although one might expect a similar interest to be focused on the child, the woman is nourished, since the ascended Christ needs no feeding. On the other hand, since Mk 1:10-13 and the *Gospel of the Hebrews* both reflect this myth in the context of Jesus' baptism rather than his birth, Robinson thinks that the underlying myth "attached itself to Christian tradition at the point where the Christian story originally opened, i.e. at the baptism, especially when there was no infancy narrative in a given situation to provide another alternative." Thus the baptismal context supplied by the *Apocalypse of Adam* may be the more original of the two.

The account in Revelation 12 has interpreted a traditional myth concerning a divine child who, together with his divine mother, is threatened by an evil power, yet is rescued and finds safety in the wilderness until the evil power is destroyed, as a *birth* story, rather similar in structure to Matthew's story of Joseph and Mary's flight to Egypt to avoid Herod's extermination of the firstborn. But the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and the Gospels of Mark and of the Hebrews have interpreted the myth as a *baptism* story.[32] In Mark the Savior is baptized in the (ordinary) water to

32. Without suggesting that Sethian interpretations were attached to the myth behind Rev 12 in precisely the following ways, one might equally well read it in terms of the Sethian exegesis of Genesis 1-6 (utilizing the above numeration of episodes 1-15 in Rev 12): The woman is celestial (associated with the sun, moon and stars) yet also gives birth, which suggests the celestial Sophia's manifestation in the form of Eve (1), who becomes pregnant (2), is opposed by an evil power, i.e. the red dragon (3) and bears a male child, i.e. Seth (4), who (with his seed) is caught up (5) to the aeon or put in a holy dwelling place (as in *Apoc. Adam*, perhaps Sodom and Gomorrah as in *Gos. Egypt*), i.e. the wilderness (6), and will stay there for a time (7), thus overthrowing the powers, i.e. the dragon (8) who brought the flood; finally a voice or Logos, i.e. Seth, will announce the arrival of final salvation (9). Or possibly the myth could reflect the activity of Sophia (1) who becomes pregnant with her passions (2), from which appears the Archon, i.e. the dragon (3). Sophia does not bear Adam, yet projects his image, which the Archon(s) fashion into Adam (4). Skipping the duplications (5, 6, 7) of episodes 11, 12 and 13, *Adam*, not the dragon, is thrown down to matter (8), but salvation arrives in the form of Epinoia or Eve-Zôê (9) whom the Archon, i.e. the dragon, pursues (10), but she becomes an eagle on the tree of Gnosis (as does Christ in *Ap. John*) (11). The couple is expelled from paradise, but produce Seth and his seed who are taken to the aeon, i.e. the wilderness (12), after which the Archon brings the flood (14) and thereafter makes war on the offspring of the woman Eve, i.e. the seed of Seth (15). Obviously there underlies the versions of the myth in Rev 12 and in the thirteen kingdoms of the *Apocalypse of Adam* a very basic mythical structure concerning a divine child who together with his divine mother is threatened by an evil power, yet is rescued and finds safety in the wilderness until the evil power is destroyed. The general pattern could be made to apply not only to Adam and his divine mother or to Seth and his mother Eve, but also to the birth of Jesus to Mary and their flight to Egypt from Herod; indeed, the pattern has a certain resemblance to aspects of the Isis-Osiris-Horus cycle as well as the stories of Zeus and Rhea, Perseus and Danaae, and Jason and Diomede.

which he comes, after which the Spirit descends to the Savior together with a Voice that pronounces him as Son of God. The parallel in Matthew agrees, but has reservations about the appropriateness of Jesus' baptism in water by the inferior figure of John, while the Fourth Gospel entirely suppresses Jesus' explicit water baptism by John, in the process demoting John to the Voice of one crying in the wilderness, whose only subsequent function is to witness to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus. Like the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the Fourth Gospel rejects the notion that the Savior could have undergone an ordinary water baptism in any meaningful sense. On the contrary, for John, Jesus is both the dispenser of the Holy Spirit—the Living Water whose ingestion brings eternal life (Jn 4:7-15; 7:37-39)—as well as the one who will baptize "his own."[33] Baptism in "water and Spirit" leads not so much towards entry into the Kingdom of God as it does to a vision of that kingdom, tantamount to being born "anew" or "from above" (cf. Jn 3:3 with 3:5-8). Here the target of anti-baptismal polemic seems to be the standard baptismal practices of the wider "apostolic" or Great Church with which the author of 1 John (1:7; 4:1-3; 5:6-8) seems to make common cause.

The targets of the anti-baptismal polemic in the *Apocalypse of Adam* are difficult to determine. They may be, as Hedrick thinks, other Sethian groups who persisted in the practice of water baptism, unaware that

33. Likewise, the second compositional stage of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* regards the Logos, who descends with the Five Seals at the conclusion of the first-stage aretalogy, as the one who pours forth Living Water upon the Spirit below out of its source, which is the Father-Voice aspect of Protennoia, called the unpolluted spring of Living Water. So also the *Gospel of the Egyptians* understands the descent of Seth as Logos to be the bestowal of a holy baptism, probably in Living Water. These baptismal descents of the Logos or Seth are initiated by Barbelo, the Father-Mother, an exalted Sophia figure, who communicates to those who loved her by Voice or Word, as in the Johannine prologue and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.

water merely symbolizes the lust of the powers, an attitude held both by the redactor and by a later branch of Sethianism that Epiphanius (*Panarion* 39-40) calls Archontics. Or they may be non-Sethian Christians who practiced water baptism. Hedrick sees no Christian influence in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and so dates it before the first half of the second century, at a point before the Christianization of the Sethian movement. However, certain motifs occur in source B which may indeed be of Christian origin, such as three of the thirteen speculations on the origin of the Illuminator as the son of a prophet, or son of a virgin or a son of Solomon attributed to the second, third and fourth kingdoms (V 78,7-79,19), the "signs and wonders" performed by the Illuminator, and the punishing of the flesh of the man upon whom the Holy Spirit comes (V 77,16-18).[34] Be this as it may, there can be no question that the final redactor of the *Apocalypse of Adam* intended to polemicize against water baptism; the true holy baptism is birth not through water, but by the Logos of the true Illuminator(s).

Perhaps this polemical situation is a reflection of a struggle within the Christian Sethian community itself. Based on Epiphanius' (*Panarion* 39-40) reports on the Sethians and Archontics, Hedrick places the *Apocalypse of Adam* at an early date (late first century)[35] before the Sethians bifurcated into pro-baptismal Sethians who maintained their Christian self-understanding and non-Christian Archontics who attached little significance to the earthly Jesus and condemned the Christian sacraments, especially baptism, but continued to use books in the name of

34. The Illuminator will come in great glory, bring the knowledge of the eternal God, and perform signs and wonders. The god of the powers will become angry, at which point the glory will withdraw and the flesh of the man who was the illuminator when he had the glory will be punished. However, since the punishment is not specified nor is said to result in death (followed by a resurrection), all one can conclude is that the reference is to an anonymous charismatic figure who ran afoul of the authorities and was punished; there is no compelling reason to identify this figure with Christ.

35. C. W. HEDRICK, *The Apocalypse of Adam: A Literary and Source Analysis* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 46; Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1980), 209-215, discussing the article of F. MORARD, "*L'Apocalypse d'Adam* de Nag Hammadi: un essai d'interprétation," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism* (ed. M. Krause; Nag Hammadi Studies 8; Leiden: Brill, 1977), 35-42; Epiphanius places the Archontics in Palestine towards the end of Constantius II's reign, ca. 350-360, although they had already spread their teaching east of the Euphrates into greater Armenia.

Seth, boasting in certain Sethian prophets such as Marsanios.[36] More recent opinion has tended to reject such an early dating for the *Apocalypse of Adam*. G. Stroumsa, J.-M. Sevrin, and F. Morard see it as a work which betrays Christian influences, especially in the name of the imperishable "illuminators" Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus (V 85,30, a barbarization of "Jesus of Nazareth"), in the description of the third appearance of the Illuminator in V 76,8-77,3, and in the thirteenth kingdom's description of the Illuminator (V 82,11-19).[37] My own inclination is to consider Hedrick's sources "A" and "B" as products of the mid-second century, while their redactional incorporation into the present *Apocalypse of Adam* may have occurred toward the end of that century. In any case, it seems probable that the emphasis on an undefiled baptism in Living Water of celestial quality in these Sethian works may be explained by the likelihood that in the late-second century the Sethians, like Mani and his followers as well as the precursors of the Archontics, were reacting strongly against certain cults, perhaps especially Christians, who practiced water baptism. On the other hand, the Sethian emphasis on a celestial baptism could proceed in a rapprochement with Christianity, as *Melchizedek*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* show,[38] and even with non-Christian groups engaging

36. Perhaps to be associated with the putative author of the Nag Hammadi tractate *Marsanes*, although the latter applies baptismal terminology, not to a community ritual, but to a heavenly rite, reminiscent of that undergone by Zostrianos.

37. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed*, 97-103; J.-M. SEVRIN, *Le dossier baptismal séthien*, Ch. 4. *passim*, while G. W. MACRAE, "The Apocalypse of Adam Reconsidered," *Society of Biblical Literature 1972 Seminar* Papers, ed. L. C. McGaughy (Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1972), 573-575, and F. MORARD, *L'Apocalypse d'Adam* (NH V, 5) (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 15; Québec and Louvain: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 1985), followed by P. PERKINS, "Apocalypse of Adam: The Genre and Function of a Gnostic Apocalypse," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39 (1977), 382-395 deny any substantial Christian influences.

38. The concept of a higher baptism is paralleled in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 63,4-68), where the Father and his Pronoia establish a superior, holy baptism conveyed by the Logos-begotten body of Seth, who descends upon Jesus and nullifies the powers of the thirteen kingdoms. This baptism involves the appearance of all the baptismal *dramatis personae* discussed already (including Micheus, Michar, and Mnesinous, Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus the Living Water and Yoel who presides "over the name"; similarly in *Zost.* and the Untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex). And, at least in Codex III, it involves the "renunciations of the Five Seals in the Spring baptism" (which F. MORARD, "*L'Apocalypse d'Adam* de Nag Hammadi: un essai d'interprétation," 37 thinks refers to an inferior water baptism). This is all

in a Platonically inspired contemplative practice of celestial ascent, as is shown by *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*.

B. The *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Thought of Norea*

The extraordinary similarity between the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World* (NHC II,*4* and *5*) has led many scholars to detect signs of redactional activity in them.[39] The current consensus seems to be that the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *On the Origin of the World* are independent interpretations of a hypothetical common source, probably a heterodox Jewish rewriting of Genesis 1-9. In turn the *Hypostasis* has perhaps undergone at least two further redactions, one Sethian (which Schenke calls an "Apocalypse of Norea"), and another Christian (which seems much influenced by Pauline notions), perhaps reaching its present form in the late-second century.

As E. Pagels[40] has shown, the present *Hypostasis of the Archons* begins with explicit citations from "the great apostle" Paul (Col 1:13 plus

very similar to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where the Five Seals, brought down by the Logos who puts on Jesus, are interpreted as a means of ascent out of the psychic and somatic thought into the light (XIII 48,6-35).

39. P. NAGEL, *Das Wesen der Archonten. Koptischer Text, Übersetzung und griechische Rückübersetzung, Konkordanz und Indizes* (Wissenschaftliche Beiträge der Martin-Luther Universität, 1970/6; Halle, 1970); R. A. BULLARD, *The Hypostasis of the Archons, The Coptic Text with Translation and Commentary* (Patristiche Texte und Studien 10), Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1970; B. LAYTON, "The Hypostasis of the Archons or The Reality of the Rulers," *Harvard Theological Review* 67 (1974), 351-425 and 69 (1976), 31-101; R. KASSER, "Formation de l'Hypostase des Archontes," *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte* 21 (1975), 83-103; A. BÖHLIG and P. LABIB, *Die Koptische-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Institut für Orientsforschung 58; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972), esp. 27-30; M. TARDIEU, *Trois mythes gnostiques, Adam, Éros et les animaux d'Égypte dans un écrit de Nag Hammadi (II,5)* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1974), esp. 30-37; B. BARC, "L'Hypostase des Archontes," in B. Barc and M. Roberge, *L'Hypostase des Archontes: Traité gnostique sur l'origine de l'Homme, du Monde et les Archontes (NH II, 4)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 5; Québec and Louvain: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 1980), esp. 1-48; L. PAINCHAUD, *L'Écrit sans titre: traité sur l'origine du monde* (NH II, 5 et XIII, 2 et Brit. Lib. Or. 4926[1]) (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 21; Québec and Louvain: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 1995), *passim*; and H.-M. SCHENKE, "Gnostic Sethianism," 596-597.

40. E. H. PAGELS, "Exegesis and Exposition of the Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected texts from Nag Hammadi," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 257-281.

Eph 6:11-12 in II 86, 22-25). It interprets the Archons' and Adam's psychic ignorance and weakness and the Archons' inability to grasp spiritual things in terms of Paul's teaching on true wisdom and power in 1 Corinthians 2:14,16-18, 15:43-49 and Colossians 3:12. The dialogue between Norea and Eleleth concluding the work likewise abounds with multiple allusions to Pauline passages that refer to spiritual conflict with hostile cosmic powers; indeed, the revelation of the spirit of truth is coincident with the eschatological appearance of the true man in a human body (II 96,33-35). Unlike the rather polemical appropriation of Johannine materials in the later redaction of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the use of Pauline conceptions and turns of phrase in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* is essentially an endorsement of Paul's treatment of the protological episodes of Genesis. Here there is no evidence of conflict with Christianity, but rather of its positive appropriation, as in Valentinian Christianity generally.

But behind this "Paulinized" version of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, there is evidence of a Sethian interpretation of an underlying heterodox, probably Jewish, reading of Genesis similar to that found in the *Apocryphon of John*, *On the Origin of the World*, and in Irenaeus' "Ophite" source (*Adversus Haereses* I.30). This source is restricted to matters of anthropogony alone with no attention to the generation and nature of the divine world typical of most Sethian treatises. Its two main focal points are the creation and enlightenment of Adam and the procreation of the human race in two branches, that of Cain and Abel, sprung from carnal intercourse, and that of Seth, sprung from the union of the enlightened Adam with the spiritual Eve-Zôê. A Sethian redactor has apparently arranged this material into a tripartite structure, according to which the account of the three stages of Adam's creation, from somatic to psychic to spiritual, correspond to a separate account of three human races, that of Cain from the carnal Eve, of Abel from the psychic Eve, and of Seth, born not from an earthly woman, but from the heavenly Adam and the spiritual woman above; the resulting generations are respectively ruled by Yaldabaoth-Samael, Sabaoth, and Sophia, and enlightened by Eve,

Eve's daughter Norea, and finally by the coming of the "true man." As B. Barc has pointed out,[41] Adam's story prefigures that of all humans:

Adam's History	Human History
Creation	
Material Adam created by Archons (87,25-33).	Carnal Cain begotten by the Powers (91,11-12).
Psychic Adam animated by chief Archon (88,3-6).	Psychic Abel begotten by chief Power (91,13-14).
Spiritual Adam indwelt/named by the Spirit (88,11-17).	Spiritual Seth begotten/named by spiritual woman (91,30-33).
Fall	
Adam placed in Paradise (88, 24-26)	Noah placed in the ark (92, 8-14).
Archons bring sleep of ignorance on Adam (89,3-10).	The Archons bring the flood (92,4-8).
Spiritual woman awakens Adam (89,11-15).	(N)orea nears the ark to join Noah (92,14-17).
The powers attempt to pollute her (89,18-24)	The Archons try to seduce Norea (92,18-31).
She hides in the Tree of knowledge (89,25-26).	Norea fails to prevent reconstruction of the ark (92,17-18)
Salvation	
Spiritual woman enters the serpent (89,31-32).	The true man incarnated in a body (96,33-35)
She gives him the fruit of the Tree (89,32-90,15).	He teaches and gives them the oil of eternal life (97, 1-4).
Adam is enlightened and leaves Paradise (90,15-91,7)	Humans know their root and ascend to the light (97,7 9; 14-16).
Adam is enlightened and leaves Paradise (90,15-91,7)	Humans know their root and ascend to the light (97,7 9: 14-16).

The prominence in this work of Norea as sister of Seth and offspring and earthly manifestation of Sophia through Eve may have inspired the short treatise *Norea* (IX,*2*), which conceives Norea on two levels.[42] She

41. See B. BARC, *L'Hypostase des Archontes*, 46-48.

42. See B. A. PEARSON, "The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature," *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm, August 20-25, 1973*, ed. G. Widengren (Kungl. Vitterhets Historie ock Antikvitets Akademiens Handlingar, Filologisk-filosofiska serien, 17. Stockholm/Leiden: Almqvist & Wiksell/E. J. Brill, 1977), 143-152.

is the upper Sophia who cried out to the Father of the All (i.e. Adamas conceived as Ennoia) and was restored to her place in the ineffable Epinoia (perhaps the light Eleleth to whom she cries in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*) and thus in the divine Autogenes. On the other hand, she is also the lower Sophia, manifested as daughter of Eve and wife-sister of Seth who is yet to be delivered from her deficiency, which will surely be accomplished by the intercession of the Four Luminaries or their ministers. It is interesting that here Adamas is himself the Father of the All, yet is also called Nous and Ennoia as well as Father of Nous, a set of identifications which recalls the nature of Adamas as bisexual, both Father and Mother, or else as Man and Son of Man (which are perhaps the two names that make the "single name" Man, *Norea* IX 28,27-29,5).

IV. 175-200+ CE: THOROUGHLY CHRISTIANIZED SETHIANISM

In the preceding, I have urged an early dating (100-125 CE) for the Pronoia monologue of the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* and the first compositional stage of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*; a slightly later date (125-175 CE) for the second and third compositional stages of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, sources A and B of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and for the shorter version of the *Apocryphon*. The longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* would have come later, about 185-200 CE, during the period when the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the *Thought of Norea* were produced. I would also urge an early date (100-125 CE) for the traditional materials they all include, such as the Sophia myth, the exegesis of Genesis 1-9 and other early Jewish traditions, the salvific triple-descent of the divine first thought, and the Barbeloite baptismal rite. Towards the end of the first century both Platonic/Neopythagorean and Christian thought begin to contribute to their theological articulation. But in the first half of the second, the polemical use of Christological motifs begin to appear, perhaps beginning with the *Trimorphic Protennoia*—which may reflect the debate over the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel evident in the Johannine epistles—by mid-century increasing in tempo with the appearance of explicit heresiological summaries and refutations of the Gnostic systems, e.g. Justin's lost

Syntagma, and culminating with Irenaeus toward the end of the second century and Hippolytus in the early third.

These Sethian treatises stress the movement of salvation from above to below by means of descending redeemer-revealers who appear and reveal gnosis at certain special points in primordial and especially in recent history where they not infrequently confer a baptismal rite (although not in *Norea* or the *Hypostasis of the Archons*).

Aside from *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, *Marsanes* and the *Three Steles of Seth*, which belong in a category apart, there are two Sethian works which I have not placed in this period: *Melchizedek* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* seems to me to have taken shape a bit later, sometime in the late second century, since it seems to presuppose the existence of the extant versions of the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. It also shares some of the baptismal nomenclature (especially Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus, and Micheus, Michar, and Mnesinous) known to the redactor of the *Apocalypse of Adam*. In turn, the baptismal doxology and trisagion used in *Melchizedek* seems to invoke a set of divine beings similar to those found in the five doxologies that punctuate the theogonic episodes narrated in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*;[43] the key element is the invocation of Doxomedon as first-born of the Aeons, a name apparently unattested elsewhere except in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Melchizedek*, and *Zostrianos*. It will also become evident that *Zostrianos*, a product of the early third century, shows many points of dependence on the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, which thus takes on the role of an important mediator between the Sethian treatises of the descent pattern and those of the ascent pattern.

A. The *Gospel of the Egyptians*

As H.-M. Schenke has suggested,[44] the emphasis of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* seems to lie upon the baptismal traditions and prayers that conclude it (III 64,9-68,1), while the preceding sections seem to provide a mythological justification for them. Indeed the first part of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* seems to be structured almost entirely around these five doxologies enumerating the principal transcendent beings whose origins

43. Compare NHC IX 16,16-18,7; 5,23-6,10 with IV 59,13-29; III 49,22-50,9; 53,12-54,6; 55,16-56,3; 61,23-62,12.

44. H.-M. SCHENKE, "Gnostic Sethianism," 600-601.

the treatise narrates: the great Invisible Spirit, the male virgin Barbelo, the thrice-male Child, the male virgin Youel (a double of Barbelo), Esephech the Child of the Child (a double of the thrice-male Child), the great Doxomedon Aeon (containing the previous three beings, cf. *Zostrianos* VIII 61,15-21 and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 43, 15-16: "the great aeon, where the Triple Male Child is"), and various other pleromas and aeons.

In comparison to the *Apocryphon of John*, the initial theogony of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* is extremely complex, introducing several new figures who are interrelated by means of various interweaving triads of divine beings. For example, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* seems to interpose within the supreme divine triad an additional, median triad[45] between the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo, namely "the living Silence," an unspecified Father, and a Thought (Ennoia). This Thought in turn becomes the Father member of the succeeding triad Ennoia, Barbelo, and the Triple Male Child. Here the Autogenes Child has been renamed the "Triple Male Child," and becomes the Father member of another new triad, the Triple Male Child, Youel, and Esephech (the Child of the Child). The first two of these three beings appear elsewhere only in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, and the third only in *Zostrianos* (metathesized as Ephesech), although not as part of a triad.[46]

45. This triad, "the living Silence," may have been developed by *Allogenes et al.* into the separate hypostasis called the Triple Power.

46. Apparently, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* understands the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo and the three beings Triple Male Child, Youel, and Esephech to constitute the Five Seals, which elsewhere designates the baptismal rite. This might be compared to the similar transcendent quintet with different names (Pronoia, Ennoia, Prognosis, Aphtharsia and Aionia Zôê) that occurs as the "aeonic Pentad" in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 6,2-10). Perhaps the *Gospel of the Egyptians* has combined two traditional numerological groupings: a triad consisting of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, and Autogenes from the *Apocryphon of John* and *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and another tradition of a pentad of divine beings that was perhaps inspired by the name of the Sethian baptismal tradition, the Five Seals. This suggests a baptismal context for these doxologies, perhaps also implying Schenke's ("Gnostic Sethianism," 603-604) notion of a divine pentad (cf. *Ap. John* II 6,2 and *Steles Seth* VII 120,20) of names (cf. *Trim. Prot.* XIII 49,28-32, "the Five seals of these particular names") which are invoked in the course of the baptismal ascent (in five stages: investiture, baptizing, enthroning, glorifying, rapture into the light, XIII 48,15-35). Perhaps these five names, associated with the Five Seals, were invoked in the course of a quintuple baptism or sealing ceremony.

It appears that Autogenes, the Child figure of the Father-Mother-Child triad of the *Apocryphon of John*, has been replaced by or expanded into another Father-Mother-Child triad (the thrice-male Child, the male virgin Youel, and Esephech the Child of the Child). This leaves the Autogenes Logos almost as an afterthought in this system, although he is still said to be produced by the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo ("Pronoia") and is still credited with establishing the Four Luminaries by his Word. Adamas seems to occupy a still lower rank, as in the *Apocryphon of John* (where he is produced by Foreknowledge and Mind): Adamas appears after, and is separated from, the Autogenes Logos and is produced by "Man" (the Invisible Spirit) and a lower double of Barbelo, Mirothoe. In turn, Adam conjoins with Prophania to produce the Four Luminaries and Seth, who conjoins with Plesithea to produce his seed. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* arranges all these female figures such as Barbelo, Youel, Meirothea, Prophania, Plesithea, and Metanoia into an interlocking series of genealogical father-mother-child triads.[47] All of these figures except Metanoia are present in *Zostrianos* (e.g., VIII 6,30-7,1), where Meirothea, Prophania, and Plesithea are the respective mothers of Adamas, Seth and the Four Luminaries, and the angels (the primordial seed of Seth).

47. Denoting father figures by "F," mother figures by "M," and son figures by "S," one can delineate the following triadic theogony: 1) The Invisible Spirit (F), the living Silence (M) and the Father (S) who is in turn the father in the triad 2) Ennoia (F), Barbelo (M) and the Thrice-male Child = the Great Christ (S) who is in turn the father of the triad 3) Thrice-male Child (F), Youel (M), and Esephech the Child of the Child (S). At this point, 4) the (Invisible) Spirit (F) and Pronoia (M; i.e. Barbelo) produce the Logos (S) who is the Autogenes Logos. The chain of triads then begins again with 5) the descent of Man (F, perhaps the Invisible Spirit) who emits Mirothoe (M) and they together produce Adamas (S) who in turn 6) as father couples with Prophania (M) to produce the Four Luminaries and Seth (S), who in turn 7) as father couples with his daughter Plesithea (M) to produce the seed of Seth (SS). Next, but now in a negative vein, 8) the voice of the fourth Luminary Eleleth (F) produces the hylic Sophia cloud (M) who by the agency of Gamaliel and Gabriel (in the Luminaries Harmozel and Oroiael respectively) produce the ignorant angel Sakla and the demon Nebruel (SS) who then produce the twelve aeons and angels presiding over Chaos. Interestingly, a double of Sophia called Metanoia is produced as another female figure who, in order to "fill up the deficiency" (in the Light Eleleth), instigates the sowing of the seed of Seth (apparently) into logos-begotten bodies or aconic dwellings prepared by Hormos. This race comes into being through Edokla (M) who gives birth by the Logos (F) to Truth and Justice (SS).

The *Gospel of the Egyptians* seems also to know the myth of Sophia from the version found in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, according to which a voice from the fourth Luminary Eleleth urges the production of a ruler for Chaos, in effect holding Sophia blameless for the creation of the lower world. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, this initiates the descent of the hylic Sophia cloud, who produces, not the chief Archon Yaldabaoth as in other Sethian treatises, but first, apparently the Matter of the lower world, and second—upon the command of Gamaliel, minister of the first Light Harmozel—two figures: the chief angel Sakla and the demon Nebruel, the makers of twelve aeons and angels and of man. After Sakla's boast in his sole deity and the traditional voice from above announcing the prior existence of Man and Son of Man, a double of Sophia named Metanoia is introduced to make up for the deficiency in the Aeon of Eleleth due to Sophia's descent. She descends to the world which is called the image of the night, which may reflect another etymology of Eleleth's name, perhaps Lilith (Adam's first but recalcitrant wife in Jewish mythology) or לילא ("night"), and suggesting that Eleleth is ultimately responsible for the created order.[48]

The *Gospel of the Egyptians* also mentions three advents (παρουσίαι) through which Seth passes at the times of the flood, the conflagration, and the (final) judgment, which are clearly related to the three descents of the Illuminator on the same three occasions in the *Apocalypse of Adam*. The tradition of Seth's advents is set in a baptismal context, since Seth's third descent serves to establish a baptism through a "logos-begotten body prepared by the virgin" (Barbelo?). This logos-begotten body turns out to be Jesus, whom Seth puts on, as in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 50,12-16; cf. the Ophite version of this theme in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30,12-13).

Finally there is the lengthy list of the various baptismal figures (III 64,9-65,26) and the two concluding hymnic sections (III 66,8-22 and 66,22-68,1) which the edition of Böhlig and Wisse has adroitly reconstructed in the form of two separate hymns of five strophes each, perhaps again reflecting the tradition of the Five Seals. In this regard, the Five Seals tradition may even have given rise to the fivefold repetition of the doxologies (enumerated above, note 43) demarcating the stages of the theogony in the first part of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, as

48. Compare הֵילֵל (ἑωσφόρος = Lucifer) of Is 14:12-15. For other etymologies of this name, see below on *Zostrianos* and in the previous chapter, on *Hypsiphrone*.

well as the quintet of beings comprising the Doxomedon aeon.[49] The concluding baptismal hymns are strongly Christian in flavor, especially the first one, mentioning Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus and, very frequently, Jesus. The list of baptismal figures preceding the prayers reveals a multitude of new names (most of which show up in the baptismal sections of *Zostrianos*) alongside the more traditional ones, such as Micheus, Michar, Mnesinous, Gamaliel and Samblo (in both the *Apocalypse of Adam* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*), and Abrasax and Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus (in the *Apocalypse of Adam*). Also included are Autogenes and his companion Adamas, Seth and his companion Jesus, the seed of Seth, and "the souls of the sons," who reside in the Four Luminaries Harmozel, Oroiael, Davithe and Eleleth respectively (as in the *Apocryphon of John* or the *Trimorphic Protennoia*).

Before passing on to the Platonizing group of Sethian treatises, one should also note the occurrence of the terms Protophanes and Kalyptos in the Sethian descent pattern treatises. "Kalyptos" occurs in a broken context in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (IV 57,16) and also—in translated form—as a cognomen for Barbelo in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 38,10, "the immeasurable one who is *hidden*"). Likewise the name Protophanes seems to occur in both the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (IV 55,25, "the First One who appeared," ⲡ[ⲓ][ϣⲟ]<ⲣⲡ̅> ⲉⲧⲁϥ-[ⲟⲩⲱⲛ̅]ϩ [ⲉ]ⲃⲟⲗ) as a cognomen for the Thrice-male Child, and in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 8,32) it occurs as a cognomen for the "true human" Pigeradamas and perhaps also as a cognomen for the "triple male" and "first human" Barbelo in II 5,11 (in the form ⲡϣⲟⲣⲡ ⲛ̅ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ). So also the feminine figure of Prophania, who in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III, 15-22) functions as Adamas' consort in the production of Seth and the Four Luminaries, is a feminine variant of Protophanes.

It appears that at an early point, certain Sethians regarded either Barbelo or Pigeradamas as the true or first—i.e., archetypal—Human to "first appear" as bisexual beings, both female (as the Ennoia of the god "Man") and male (as Triple Male Child, the Son of the god "Man").

49. The *Doxomedon* Aeon contains the supreme pentad of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, the Triple Male Child, Youel, and Esepech (IV 56,23-57,1); compare the Pentads of *Ap. John* II 6,2-10 (the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility, and Eternal Life), of *Eugnostos* (Propator, Autopator, Immortal Man, Son of Man, and Savior/Son of Son of Man), of Irenaeus' (*Haer.* 1.30.1) Ophites (First Man, Ennoia, Second Man, Third Man, First Woman), and of Philo's "Ark" in *QE* 2.68 (the Logos plus the creative, ruling, merciful, and legislative "powers").

When the Father-Mother-Child triad was adopted as the supreme Sethian triad, these two figures became distinct Mother (Barbelo) and Son/Child (Autogenes) figures, but continued to bear their older epithets. When the Platonizing Sethian treatises reconceived Barbelo as a divine Intellect or Aeon, these epithets or cognomens were parceled out as its three subaeons, according to which the Barbelo Aeon was initially hidden (Kalyptos), then first appeared (Protophanes), and then instantiated (Autogenes), while the Triple Male Child continued Barbelo's soteriological role as a being at large in the Barbelo Aeon, generally associated with Protophanes and Autogenes.

As an aid in conceptualizing this welter of beings that populate the divine world of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the following table is offered, where the figures are categorized by Father-Mother-Child relationships:

The Theogony of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*

Father Figures	Mother Figures	Son Figures
1) Invisible Spirit	Silence – Pronoia – Barbelo	Thrice Male Child – Gt. Christ
Contents of Doxomedon Aeon:		
Thrice Male Child		
Ogdoad of Father	(Prognosis, Aphtharsia, Aionia Zôê,	Logos, Thelema, Nous)
Ogdoad of Mother	(?)	
Ogdoad of Son	(seven voices?)	
Domedon Doxomedon		
2) Thrice Male Child	Youel	Esephech Child of Child
3) (Invisible) Spirit	Pronoia	Autogenes Logos
4) Autogenes Logos	Mirothoe	Adamas
5) Adamas + Autogenes Logos	Prophania	Seth & Four Luminaries
6) Seth	Plesithea	Seed of Seth
4 Luminaries & Contents:		
Harmozel – Adamas	Charis Mneme	Gamaliel
Oroiael – Seth	Synesis Agape	Gabriel
Davithe – Seed of Seth	Aisthesis Eirene	Samblo
Eleleth – Earthly Sethites	Phronesis Aionia Zôê	Abrasax
7) Eleleth, Gamaliel, Gabriel	Hylic Sophia Cloud	Sakla & Nebruel
8) Hormos (?)	Metanoia	Earthly Sethites (?)
9) Logos	Edokla	Truth & Justice of Sethites

B. *Melchizedek*

Melchizedek is in sufficiently fragmentary condition as to preclude any thorough redactional analysis, although there are certainly traces of such activity. The bulk of the treatise is occupied with a lengthy revelation to Melchizedek, priest of God most high, from Gamaliel, traditionally identified as the servant of Harmozel, the first of the Sethian Four Luminaries, and one of the three or four "receivers" who during the baptismal rite rapture the enlightened seed of Seth into the light.[50] In the *Pistis Sophia* (I.26 etc.), in the company of the overseer Jeu, Melchizedek himself is the "receiver" (παραλήμπτωρ)—or presides over other "receivers"—who raptures purified souls into the treasury of Light away from the archons, who swallow up their material remains. In *Melchizedek*, in the course of Gamaliel's revelation, Melchizedek—who seems to be an eternal figure, strictly of an earthly nature, but without specific origin or end—is told of the future fleshly appearance, suffering, and rising of Jesus Christ, who is the true "priest of God most high" of whom Melchizedek is the earthly image (cf. Heb 7:3). At Christ's advent, there will be a great struggle with the archons—with whom Melchizedek has already had to contend—who will spread lies about him just as they have concerning the true Adam, Eve, Abel, Enoch, Noah, and others. But the victory over the archons is assured, for at the end of the treatise, Christ appears to Melchizedek to promise not only his own final victory (he is "chief commander of the All"), but also that of Melchizedek (cf. the Qumran fragments 11QMelch); having now received baptism in Christ's name, he is able to offer up spiritual sacrifices (of himself and his followers) as opposed to the animal sacrifices of his pre-baptismal priesthood.

In IX 5,23-6,10, Gamaliel follows his initial self-identification with the following invocation of prominent Sethian figures:

> **IX 5** [23] [O] essence of the [aeons [24] a]ba[ba ai]aiai ababa!
> O [25] divine A[utogen]es of the [...] [26] [... the motion of every nature]! [27]
> O Mother] of the aeons, [B]arb[elo]! [28]
> O first-]born of the aeons, **6** [1] splendid Doxomedon Dom[edon]! [2]
> O one of visions, Jesus Christ! [3]
> O chief commanders of the Luminaries, you [powers] [4] Armozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, [5] Eleleth!
> And you man-of-light, [6] immortal Aeon Pigeradamas! [7]
> And you good god of the [8] beneficent worlds, Mirocheirothetou! [9]
> Through Jesus Christ, the Son [10] of God.

50. See the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 64,22-65,1. In *Melchizedek* (IX 5,17-23) Gamaliel is said to have been sent "to [rapture] the congregation of the children of Seth," which is precisely the function assigned him in the traditional Sethian liturgical fragment embedded in one of the third-person narrative insertions in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 48,15-35): "And those who rapture raptured (him)—Gamaliel, [...]anen, Samblo, the servants of <the> great holy Luminaries—and they took him into the light-[place] of his Fatherhood."

On the completion of Gamaliel's lengthy revelation, Melchizedek offers himself up as a sacrifice, and says he will pronounce his name as he "receives baptism [now] (and) forever among the living (and) holy [names], and in the [waters]." At this point he offers an ascription of praise (IX 16,16-18,7) in the form of a *trisagion* to various figures, again including the holy Father Abel Baruch ("blessed Father-God"), perhaps Autogenes (all that remains is "...]az"), the Mother Barbelo, Doxomedon, the Four Luminaries Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, and Eleleth, probably the Man of Light Pigeradamas ("chief [commander ...]man"), Mirocheirothetos, and Jesus Christ as commander-in-chief of the All. In both cases, the supreme figure or "essence of the aeons" who does "not exist" (i.e., is beyond being) is the Father of the All, Abel Baruch (probably "blessed Father God"). Oddly enough, the relative rank of Barbelo the Mother of the aeons and of Autogenes seems to be the reverse of their normal Sethian ranking. The figure of Doxomedon Dom[edon?], the first born of the aeons, is found elsewhere only in *Zostrianos* and in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, (where he seems to be a kind of aeonic container for the ogdoads of the Father, Mother and Child). In the *trisagion*, the first and fourth of Four Luminaries are called "commanders in chief," and the other two "commanders." Both before and after the Four Luminaries, a *trisagion* is addressed to figures both of whose names end in "...]man"; normally this would be the Man of light Pigeradamas, but the invocation on page 5 cited above identifies the first instance as Jesus Christ. Finally, both lists conclude with the figures of Mirocheirothetos (perhaps meaning "anointed one") and Jesus Christ.

Thus, as B. A. Pearson suggests,[51] *Melchizedek* may be "a Jewish-Christian product containing an originally pre-Christian Melchizedek speculation overlaid with Christian christological speculation" of the

51. B. A. Pearson, ed. and trans., "Melchizedek," in *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, eds. *idem* and S. Giversen (Nag Hammadi Studies 15. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 229-250.

sort found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which has been recast as a Sethian revelation discourse.

V. 200+ CE: THE PLATONIZING SETHIAN TREATISES

The Sethian treatises of the "descent pattern" seem to have been produced in the second century. They make much use of Jewish and Christian scriptural tradition in their depiction of sacred history, cosmic eschatology, and soteriology, features which we shall see are largely lacking in the Platonizing Sethian treatises *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes*. The latter contain no obvious Christian features and little that is Jewish beyond various sacred names. They focus, not on a diachronic, temporal, horizontal/linear axis of a sequence of cosmic events (*Heilsgeschichte*), but instead, upon a synchronic, atemporal, vertical axis of a hierarchy of ontological realities and modes of cognitive experience. Such eschatology as they do contain is focused on neither cosmos nor society, but on the spiritual progress of individuals. Like the treatises of the descent pattern, the Platonizing Sethian treatises are also concerned to pass on their teaching to the elect generations of the future. But the doctrine they pass on is centered on the phenomenon of individual enlightenment in the here and now rather than on a history of progressive enlightenment through successive descents of a revelatory figure. Of dominantly Platonic inspiration, the ancient tradition upon which they focus is not so much biblical as it is Platonic, inspired by the "revelations" contained in the mythical portions of Plato's dialogues, especially the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*. Their eschatology is not transhistorical and cosmic, but individual and personal, and its goal or *eschaton* is individual spiritual improvement and salvific enlightenment. We now turn to the compositional history of those treatises.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHRONOLOGY AND REDACTION OF THE SETHIAN TREATISES: PART II TREATISES OF THE ASCENT PATTERN AND SUMMARY

I. 200-300 CE: THE SETHIAN RAPPROCHEMENT WITH PLATONISM

By the end of the second century, with not a few of their treatises in circulation, many Christian Sethians must have experienced growing tension with a developing Christian orthodoxy that increasingly resisted Sethian and various other attempts to elaborate upon the myth of the preexistent redeemer Christ. Facing increasing rejection by the apologetes, heresiologists, and other militant intelligentsia of the wider Church, those Sethians who had not the stomach for such controversy would have begun to seek out other, less problematical spiritual affiliations. No doubt some turned away from comparatively more socially-zealous institutional religions toward the more reflective and philosophical alternatives offered by pagan religious traditions that would be conducive to articulating their sense of being an elect people.

One such alternative was popular Platonism of the sort espoused not only by formal Middle Platonic philosophical schools and popular epitomes of Platonic doctrine but also by the Hermetic movement and the growing supply of treatises under the name of Hermes Trismegistus. Such a shift would likely have entailed an attenuation—though certainly not cessation—of emphasis on community membership and social boundaries defined along the lines of moral purity, group ritual performance, and leadership hierarchies toward an emphasis on the discovery of the truth within oneself through individual acts of transcendental speculation and mystical contemplation. But an increasing interest in self-performable techniques of spiritual ascent with its attendant possibilities for individualism could also have encouraged a de-emphasis upon the older eschatological interpretation of their own sacred history. Since such a de-emphasis would tend to loosen their sense of being a community defined by ancient tradition, Sethianism as a self-conscious social

movement could easily have begun to fragment and dwindle. In fact, during the last quarter of the fourth century, the heresiologist Epiphanius of Salamis (*Panarion* 39.1.1-4) seemed to have difficulty in remembering where Sethians could be found, although he does state that a branch he calls the Archontics could be found in decline in Palestine after having reached a peak around the time of Constantine (*Panarion* 40.1.1-2).

While the earlier Sethian treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and *Gospel of the Egyptians* portray the advent of salvation through a series of temporally successive salvific descents by the supreme deity's First Thought appearing in various modalities or guises, the group of treatises comprising *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Marsanes* exhibit a more vertical, non-temporal, supra-historical scheme in which salvation is achieved, not through a higher being's revelatory descents, but through a graded series of visionary ascents initiated by the Gnostic himself. The conceptuality of these treatises is dominated by interest in the hierarchical levels of the transcendental world marked out by the stages of the visionary ascent. The levels are conceived as aeons that are usually identified by the name of the spiritual power that presides over each one, and the spiritual powers so named are largely the same ones that occur in the descent-pattern treatises already discussed: the Invisible Spirit and its Silence; the male virginal Barbelo and her three powers (now completely redefined); her son the divine Autogenes; Adamas/Pigeradamas and the Triple-Male Child; and certain feminine powers who appear to be lower doubles of Barbelo, such as Youel/Yoel and Meirothea. On the other hand, some of the descent-pattern names no longer occur, such as those of the earthly protoplasts Adam, Eve, Seth, and Noah, and those of the descending feminine revelatory powers Pronoia, Epinoia, and, except for *Zostrianos* and perhaps *Marsanes*, even Sophia. No longer does one find accounts of the origin and structure of the lower world. Gone also is nearly any trace of Christian conceptuality. Instead, a host of new terms and names are introduced: the Triple Powered One, Kalyptos (the Hidden One), Protophanes (the First Appearing One), the Repentance, the Sojourn, the Aeonic Copies, the Ethereal Earth, as well as rather more abstract terms, such as Being, Life, Mind, Existence, Vitality, Mentality, "those who truly exist," "those who are unified," "the all-perfect ones." "the perfect

individuals,"[1] and a host of others. The most distinctive trait of these novel figures is that their significance can only be understood against the backdrop of contemporary Neopythagorean and Middle- and Neo-Platonic metaphysics. The generation of divine beings no longer proceeds in terms of a procreative theogonical model with its various

1. Among the four Platonizing Sethian treatises from Nag Hammadi, *Allogenes* makes the least use of the traditional Sethian figures, while *Zostrianos* and, to a lesser extent, *Marsanes* retain many, and even supply additional ones. In *Marsanes* one finds Gamaliel, one of the servants of the Four Luminaries (X 64,19). In the case of *Zostrianos*, which seems to constitute a deliberate attempt to reinterpret the more traditional Sethian baptismal rite in terms of the metaphysics and transcendentalia found in *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth*, there are many more such "holdovers." From the system of the *Apocryphon of John* one finds the Invisible Spirit. The emergence of Barbelo as his self-knowledge is also retained, although Barbelo loses her maternal and feminine character when she becomes referred to as the (masculine) Aeon of Barbelo. Barbelo still subsumes a triad, but with different names: Kalyptos (Hidden One, an epithet of Barbelo occurring also in *Trim. Prot.* and *Gos. Egypt.*), Protophanes (First-appearing One), and Autogenes (Self-begotten One) replace Prognosis, Aphtharsia, and Aionia Zôê; no longer attributes granted to Barbelo by the Invisible Spirit, these beings become the modes in which the Barbelo Aeon deploys itself. The thrice-masculine aspect of Barbelo is now hypostatized as the Triple Male Child, as in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. The divine Autogenes now shares his status as Barbelo's offspring with his prior siblings Kalyptos and Protophanes, yet he retains his Four Luminaries Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, and Eleleth, which contain respectively Adamas, Seth, the seed of Seth, and other repentant souls. In *Zostrianos*, the generation of Sophia is not narrated, nor is she considered the mother of the creator Archon; somewhat as in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, her downward inclination is said to produce the matter shaped by an independently existing Archon creator according to Sophia's reflection of the upper aeons; even so, this apparently necessitates her subsequent repentance and restoration. From tradition contained in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, we find the mother of Adamas, Meirothea, whom *Zostrianos* interprets as a "Thought of the perfect Mind" (Protophanes) belonging to Autogenes. Perhaps also deriving from the *Trimorphic Protennoia* is (H)armedon, a figure in the Light Harmozel. In *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* (H)armedon becomes a cognomen for the male Mind Protophanes. *Zostrianos* mentions the servants of the holy Lights Gamaliel and Gabriel as well as the baptists Michar, Micheus, and Mnesinous found in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Apocalypse of Adam*; it is likely that the presence of these figures in *Zostrianos* was mediated by a tradition immediately associated with the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, since the grouping of the baptists in *Zostrianos* VIII 6,7-17 as Micheus and Michar separately from Mnesinous is elsewhere attested only in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 64,9-65,26; the generally garbled distribution of Gamaliel, Abrasax [lacking in *Trim. Prot.*] and Samblo in VIII 47,1-27 and of these together with Gabriel [lacking in *Trim. Prot.*] in VIII 57-58 suggests merely traditional but not formulaic influence).

mother and father figures, but by the self-generation or emanation of a lesser product from its higher, more unitary source.

Bearing these shifts in mind, the following observations about the individual Platonizing Sethian treatises may be offered.

A. *Zostrianos*

Among the Platonizing Sethian treatises, *Zostrianos* maintains the most continuity with the treatises of the descent pattern by virtue of its large fund of baptismal mythologumena and its reference to the story of Sophia and her offspring, the creator of the lower world. The conceptual frame of *Zostrianos* is based in a practice of visionary ascent to the highest levels of the divine world that resembles those found in Jewish "heavenly ascent" apocalypses, but is in fact more akin to Platonic "apocalypses" like the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic* X 614B-621B or the myth of Timarchus in Plutarch's *De genio Socratis* (590A-592E). That is, the ascent of the visionary is expected to be imaginatively replicated, not only by the reader in the present, but also by the soul upon the death of the body, and the actual goal of the ascent is the visionary's contemplative assimilation to the ontic character of the level to which he or she ascends. Nevertheless, *Zostrianos* portrays this ascent as in terms of the older tradition of baptismal ascent: assimilation to each successively higher ontological level is signified by being baptized in the name of the spiritual being that presides over it. As a result, *Zostrianos* refers to many of the baptismal *dramatis personae* familiar from the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and treats them in three rather distinct blocks (VIII, pages 6, 29-32, and 47).

While *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth* take no interest at all in the realm of Nature below the aeon(s) of Autogenes (according to *Allogenes* XI 51,28-31 it merely contains defects to be rectified by Autogenes), *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* treat this realm extensively. *Zostrianos* enumerates six levels of being below Autogenes, called—in descending order—the "Self-begotten Aeons," the Repentance (μετανόια), the Sojourn (παροίκησις), the Aeonic Copies (ἀντίτυποι) of the previous three, the airy earth (probably the atmosphere below the moon), and the thirteen aeons (i.e. the physical world), levels that correspond roughly to the first six "seals" of *Marsanes*' thirteen-level universe.

Although it is unclear in *Zostrianos* as it now stands, the Untitled text of the Bruce Codex (263,11-264,6 Schmidt-MacDermot, cited in Chapter 3, p. 111) allows us to conjecture that the Self-begotten Aeons constitute the level at which Zostrianos is baptized five times in the name of Autogenes. They contain the vast majority of the divine beings traditionally named in other Sethian treatises: the Living Water (Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus), the baptizers Micheus, Michar (and Mnesinous), the purifier Barpharanges, a figure called Zogenethlos, and besides these, the Four Luminaries Harmozel, Oroiael, Davithe and Eleleth, together with Sophia.

In *Zostrianos*, the Four Luminaries reside in the Self-generated Aeons, and are inhabited by more or less the same figures as in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*: Adamas is found in Harmozel, Seth Emmacha Seth and Ephesech the Child of the Child are found in Oroiael, and the seed of Seth are found in Davithe. In addition, certain other triads of beings are residents in or around the Four Luminaries (VIII 127,16-128,7). One finds also the maternal figures of Meirothea (VIII 30,14-15), Prophania (VIII 51,12) and Plesithea (VIII 6,31) among the Self-begotten ones, first defined in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* as the respective mothers of Adamas, of Seth and the Four Luminaries, and of the Seth's seed, called "the angels." Also contained in these aeons is the figure of Ephesech, the Child of the Child, who also occurs in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* as Esephech, the child figure of a Father, Mother, and Child triad consisting of the Thrice-male Child, Youel, and Esephech, but there occupying a level immediately *above* that of Autogenes. On the other hand, the lately repentant souls (of the historical Sethians) that the *Apocryphon of John* places in the fourth Luminary Eleleth are located by *Zostrianos* in the level of Metanoia immediately below the self-begotten Aeons.

Most strikingly, the Platonizing Sethian treatises have dispensed with the traditional Father-Mother-Child triad of the descent pattern treatises in favor of a new conception according to which the Mother figure of Barbelo is reconceived as an entire aeonic realm that has been in turn tripartitioned into three subaeons, Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes. In this scheme, not only does Autogenes preside over his four Self-generated Aeons, but also Protophanes is given four triads of Aeons: 1) Harmedon (the cognomen of Protophanes in *Allogenes* XI 45,36; 58,17) together with Se(l)men and Theophaneus, 2) Akremon together with Zachthos and Yachthos, 3) Ambrosius together with Setheus and Antiphantes, and 4) perhaps Hymneos together with Seldao

and Elenos.[2] Again, Kalyptos is associated with a tetrad consisting of (H)armedon (reading ⲁⲣⲙⲏⲇⲱⲛ in VIII 119,5) together with Aphredon and perhaps Armê, a second aeon consisting of Diphaneus and Deiphanea, a third aeon containing Marsedon or Malsedon, and a fourth containing Solmis and Olmis; here also Youel seems to reside (VIII 125,11-15). So too Doxomedon ("ruler of glory") is also somehow associated with Kalyptos (VIII 126,8). In comparison to *Allogenes*, whose author consciously limits speculation on such subsidiary aeons (XI 67,22-35), *Zostrianos* is quite guilty of multiplying hypostases, but these are no doubt derived from the Sethian baptismal tradition central to the author's concerns—as the presence of many of these names in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* attests—and not merely from free invention.[3]

In fact, the Sethian text mentioning most of these *dramatis personae* that the author of *Zostrianos* introduces as sub-aeons beginning at the level of Protophanes is the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. *Zostrianos* seems to derive its catalogue of important female figures such as Barbelo, Youel, Meirothea, Prophania, Plesithea, and Metanoia from the elaborate scheme of Father-Mother-Child triads developed in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, but no longer arranges them into genealogical triads, even though *Zostrianos* names them all as mothers at one point or another. Beyond these maternal figures, *Zostrianos* witnesses also to Barpharanges the purifier, occurring elsewhere only in Codex Bruce *Untitled* (263, 27 Schmidt-MacDermot) and in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* as Sesengen[bar]pharanges. Since this figure appears in *Zostrianos* VIII 6,7-17 along with the other baptismal figures discussed above, it is

2. Seldao and Elenos are mentioned in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 64,9-65,26 as "those over the mountain" ["rising" in IV,2], but assigned by the Bruce Codex, *Untitled* 263,11-264,6 [Schmidt-MacDermot] to Autogenes.

3. Many formulations seem unique to *Zostrianos*, e.g. Akremon, Akron, Ambrosios, Antiphantes, Aphropais, Apophantes, Audael, Authrounios, Bathormos, Euthrounios, Eidea(-os), Eidomeneus, Eiron, Eukrebos, Eurios, Eurumeneus, Keilar, Kodere, Laraneus, Loel, Malsedon or Marsedon, Nephredon, Olmis, Ormos, Phaleris, Phalses, Prones, Sappho, Selmechel, Seth Emmacha Seth, Setheus, Siou, Stetheus, Sumpthar, Thouro, Yachthos, Yolaos, Zachthos, and Zogenethlos (and other—undecipherable—names). In addition, in *Allogenes* (XI 54,11-37), the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 125,23-126,17) and *Zostrianos* (VIII 51,24-52,24; 86,13-23; cited in parallel columns in Chapter 14), there occurs a special aretalogical ascription of praise delivered to or invoking certain beings that seem to belong to the Aeon of Barbelo and are associated with her subaeons Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes; their names are listed in Chapter 3, n. 24.

likely that *Zostrianos* is dependent on some such list as appears in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 64,9-65,26). *Zostrianos* distributes these figures between those who assist in Zostrianos' first four baptisms in the name of divine Autogenes and those figures that are explained by Ephesech in VIII 47,1-27 in the interval between Zostrianos' fourth and fifth baptism in the name of the divine Autogenes. Finally, it is interesting to note that the figure of Doxomedon, which occurs in each of the five doxologies in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*,[4] appears elsewhere in extant Sethian literature only in the non-Christian *Zostrianos* (VIII 126,8) and in the similar lists of beings praised in the Christian Sethian treatise *Melchizedek* (IX 5,23-6,10; 16,16-18,7).

In sum, it appears that *Zostrianos* was indeed dependent on some version of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* itself, from which it derived almost all of its baptismal *dramatis personae* as well as the figures of Youel (not Yoel), Doxomedon, Esephech, Meirothea, Prophania, Plesithea and Metanoia, and perhaps many others which can no longer be identified in the extant state of the text.

B. *Allogenes*

The first third of *Allogenes* is devoted to explaining the unfolding of the basic structure of the divine world from the Invisible Spirit by means of its Triple Power into the Aeon of Barbelo, which encompasses Kalyptos, Protophanes, the Triple Male Child, and Autogenes. While the *Apocryphon of John* depicts this self-unfolding as a process of mental self-reflection, in *Allogenes* its separate stages are worked out in a manner that becomes typical of Neoplatonism, a three-phase unfolding through successive modalities of the Invisible Spirit's "Triple Power" (Existence, Vitality, and Mentality) to form the Aeon of Barbelo. The Aeon of Barbelo, who as the divine First Thought here functions as a cosmic Intelligence, is subdivided into three named levels that are described in terms of the Platonic ontology of the cosmic Mind: Kalyptos, the contemplated Mind, contains the paradigmatic ideas or authentic existents; Protophanes, the contemplating Mind, contains a subdivision of the ideas, "those who are unified," distinguished from the authentic existents (by being combinable with each other unlike the authentic existents; cf. Plato's "mathematicals" *apud* Aristotle, *Met.* I.6 and

4. IV 59,13-29; III 49,22-50,17; 53,12-54,11; 55,16-56,3; 61,23-62,13.

XIII.6) and from the ideas of particular things ("the perfect individuals"). At the lowest level, Autogenes, portrayed as a demiurgic mind who shapes the realm of Nature (φύσις) below, contains the "perfect individuals," or ideas of individual entities, perhaps individual souls. Since the distinction between the "individuals" in Autogenes and "those who exist together" in Protophanes is rather slight for the author of *Allogenes*, the Triple Male Child fits in nicely as a sort of mediator between them. This mediating function of the Triple Male also qualifies him for the title of Savior (XI 58,13-15).

Aside from this metaphysical articulation of the Barbelo Aeon, what is really original in *Allogenes* is the scheme of the visionary ascent experienced by *Allogenes*. Certainly Sethianism was familiar with accounts of the ecstatic visionary ascents of Enoch, Elijah, Abraham, Jacob, Paul and others contained in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic. But as I have shown elsewhere,[5] *Allogenes* is distinguished by its peculiar metaphysico-epistemological articulation of the individual intellect's visionary ascent whereby it assimilates itself to the hierarchy of ontological levels with which it was aboriginally consubstantial but from which it had become separated. In *Allogenes*, one undergoes the ascent according to a prescribed sequence of mental states: earthbound vision; ecstatic extraction from body and soul involving a transcending of traditional gnosis; a silent but unstable seeking of oneself; firm standing; and sudden ultimate vision characterized as an ignorant knowledge devoid of any content that might distinguish between subject and contemplated object. Each stage is characterized by increasing self-unification, stability and mental abstraction, a movement away from motion and multiplicity toward stability and solitariness.

In such a way, Allogenes achieves a vision of the Aeon of Barbelo and the beings comprising it (XI 57,29-58,26), but then surpasses even the ascent of Zostrianos to the Barbelo Aeon by transcending not only his earthly garment, but even his own knowledge by means of a non-knowing cognitive vacancy and sees the Mentality, Vitality and Existence aspects of the Triple Power of the Invisible Spirit (XI 58,27-60,37). At this point Allogenes is suddenly filled by a "primary revelation" of the Unknown One and his Triple Power (XI 60,37-61,22). The rest of the treatise is mostly devoted to an interpretation of his visionary experience in terms of a negative theology (XI 61,32-62,13; supplemented by a more positive theology, XI 62,14-67,20). As pointed out in Chapter 2, this negative theology contains a nearly word-for-word parallel with the one found in the beginning of the *Apocryphon of John* (XI 62,28-63,23 = II 3,18-35 = BG 23,3-26,13). *Allogenes* is thus likely to have borrowed traditional apophatic material from older sources, including the *Apocryphon of John*.

5. See my "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 341-346 and M. A. WILLIAMS, "Stability as a Soteriological Theme in Gnosticism," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, Vol. 2: Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton (Studies in the History of Religions 41; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 819-829, and *IDEM, The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (Nag Hammadi Studies, 29; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985).

C. The *Three Steles of Seth*

The *Three Steles of Seth* clearly represents the same ontological doctrine and ascensional praxis found in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, yet instead of narrating the ascent, it is constructed as a triptych of presentations of praise and blessing to Autogenes, Barbelo and the pre-existent One in connection with a communal practice of a three-stage ascent and descent. After an initial revelation and various macarisms rendered by Seth (VII 118,5-120,28), who praises the bisexual Pigeradamas as a Meirotheid (i.e., begotten of his mother Meirothea), and as Mirotheos (perhaps "divine anointed one"), the rest of the treatise uses the first person plural for ascribing praise to 1) Autogenes (also called Meirotheos), originator of "another race", 2) to the Triple Male Barbelo (addressed also as Kalyptos and Protophanes), emanated from the Triple Powered One and characterized by being, living, and knowing, and 3) to the preexistent One who is characterized by the existence-life-mind triad comprising the Triple Power. The whole concludes with a rubric (VII 126,32-127,22) that explains the use of the steles in the practice of descent from the third to the second to the first; likewise, the way of ascent is the way of descent.[6]

6. Cf. Heraclitus' "the way up and the way down are one and the same," ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὠυτή (Diels B60). The fact that the method of descent is mentioned first is strange; one notes that the Jewish Merkabah mystics called themselves *Yorde Merkabah*, "descenders to the Merkabah." In *A Valentinian Exposition: On Baptism B* (XI,2*a* 41,33-38 the "Jordan" symbolizes the way of descent, "which is also [the upward progression], that [is, our exodus] from the world [into] the Aeon.").

The *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 122,1-14) reflects a doctrine of the emanation of the Aeon of Barbelo similar to *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. Barbelo is addressed as "the first shadow of the holy Father, a light from light," originating as "a shadow of him, thou a Kalyptos." Like *Zostrianos*, *Melchizedek*, and the *Apocryphon of John* (but unlike *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*), *Three Steles* preserves the name of Seth's father, the heavenly Adam Pigeradamas. At the point where the *Three Steles of Seth* shifts from Seth as the speaker to the "we" of the Sethian community, the "Triple Male" Barbelo is blessed as the unifier and completer of the All and Savior of the perfect individuals (VII 120,34b-121,16; cf. *Allogenes*, XI 58,13-15). He is the giver of crowns, which in *Zostrianos* (VIII 57,12-58,16) are given by Gamaliel and Gabriel and described by Yoel as bearing seals which are the three kinds belonging to Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes. This suggests that the author of the *Three Steles of Seth* may have used the term Triple Male, originally an epithet of Barbelo, to designate that phase of Barbelo that has gone forth into (or from) the middle, namely, Autogenes.

The position of the *Three Steles of Seth* relative to the other three is more indeterminate, since the title does not seem to be echoed in any ancient *testimonia*, perhaps because it was an inner-group liturgical text. If anything, it is closer in terminology and spirit to *Allogenes*, yet, like *Zostrianos*, it seems to preserve more of the basic Sethian *dramatis personae* than *Allogenes*, such as Pigeradamas and Emacha Seth, although like *Allogenes*, it seems to represent a phase of Sethianism in which the ascensional rite has become detached from the older baptismal mystery. It contains little of the profusion of aeonic beings evident in *Zostrianos*; it lacks the Triple Male Child, Youel, and Ephesech triad that tends to disrupt the otherwise strictly triadic structure (Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes) of the Barbelo Aeon. Many of the beings produced in the course of the theogony of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (upon which *Zostrianos* builds its aeonic structure) are never mentioned in the *Three Steles of Seth*, which reflects the ascensional praxis of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, but without the transcendental baptismal schemata that one finds in *Zostrianos*. Of all four treatises, its portrayal of the emergence of Barbelo from the Invisible Spirit is extremely close to Moderatus' (late first century) account of the emergence of Quantity within his second "One," to be discussed in Chapter 9. On the whole, I suspect it to be contemporary with *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* but earlier

than *Marsanes* and the Bruce Codex, even though it seems to preserve a simpler and perhaps earlier version of the basic structure of the Barbelo Aeon than the other Platonizing Sethian treatises.

D. *Marsanes*

Marsanes and the Untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex are probably the latest of the Sethian treatises that we possess. Like *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, *Marsanes* records the visionary experience of a singular individual, probably a visionary prophet and teacher affiliated with a non-Christian wing of the gnostic Sethian movement of the first four centuries CE. B. A. Pearson[7] suggests that the name Marsanes, mentioned in the Untitled text of the Bruce Codex (ch. 7, 235,14-23 Schmidt-MacDermot) in connection with Nicotheos (and Marsianos by Epiphanius [*Panarion* 40.7.6] in his account of the Archontics), reflects a Syrian background for its author. The treatise is a pagan revelation discourse produced in the late third or early fourth century to establish the authority of Marsanes as the inspired leader and teacher of a small group of relatively well-indoctrinated Sethian Gnostics. In the process, it effected a rapprochement of traditions at home in Gnostic Sethianism with contemporary grammatical theory and Middle Platonic/Neoplatonic metaphysics and epistemology as a means of expounding the true nature of the Sethian divine and cosmic hierarchy and assuring its recipients of their ultimate salvation. The author composed this treatise on the basis both of personal experience and of mythologumena drawn from the theogonical, metaphysical, and ritual doctrine most evident in two Sethian treatises that were already at hand, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, summarizing this in such a way as to claim that he or she has experienced the full measure and truth of this doctrine, and on this basis to advance beyond those earlier treatises by propounding doctrine on subjects not treated in them. While previous treatises like the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes* had concentrated on theology or the metaphysics of the highest principles and intelligible realities and the means of knowing these, *Marsanes*—even though it offers its own equally abstruse metaphysics—now offers a Sethian Gnostic physics and psychology based on astrology, theurgical technique, and a theory

7. B. A. Pearson, "Introduction" to *Marsanes* in *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, (Nag Hammadi Studies 15. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 229-250.

of language. Of all the Sethian treatises, *Marsanes* is the most insistent that the perceptible realm of becoming and sensation is worthy of complete preservation.[8] Since not only one's soul, but also this sensible world is worthy of being preserved in its entirety (X 5,22-26), a knowledge of its nature and constituents is also necessary, and for this the elements of ordinary language (letters and their combinations, syllables, words, and discursive discourse) offer themselves as a means for articulating this knowledge and applying it to the practical problem of dealing with the powers that influence and control that world.

In this connection, it is interesting that among the Sethian treatises, it is apparently only *Marsanes* that singles out—although in a highly fragmentary context—the cosmic soul for separate mention ("And [it is a] soul [that has] this [sort of corporeality], namely [the] celestial soul [that sur]rounds [the world]," X 21,20-24). Unlike some Middle Platonists and all Neoplatonists, none of the other Sethian treatises seem to posit such a separate hypostasis of Soul. While they presuppose that the natural realm is populated by ensouled bodies, they locate the realm of disembodied souls in the aeons presided over by Autogenes (without further specification of location in *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth*), perhaps in the Four Luminaries in the *Apocryphon of John*, or in the case of *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*, in the Self-generated Aeons, the Repentance, and the Sojourn. While it has often been noted that the figure of Sophia frequently bears the distinctive characteristics of the cosmic soul, the attributes of instability implied by the soul's basic function as source of all locomotion and change tend to dominate Sophia's characterization, no doubt owing to her causative role in the Gnostic myth of the fall of souls.

8. See B. A. PEARSON, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 162-164 and *IDEM*, ed. with S. Giversen, *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X* (Nag Hammadi Studies 15; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 247-248. This passage (X 5,22-26), together with X 41,30-42,6 about the blessedness of one who gazes at the planets shows Platonic influence, citing Taurus' view that souls descend "for the completion of the universe," i.e., the descent is voluntary on the soul's part and positive (for the good of the universe) and not caused by τόλμα. The Taurus quotation comes from Iamblichus' *de Anima* in a discussion of the soul's descent. Iamblichus adopts Taurus' view, arguing (against Plotinus and others) that the descent is necessary and that pure souls descend willingly, but impure souls unwillingly as punishment for the conduct of their past lives. See J. FINAMORE, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 96-101.

In the matter of ritual, *Marsanes* contains a number of passages that seem to allude to baptism, not necessarily an actual rite enacted by an organized community, but rather one of the sort that *Zostrianos* associates with the practice of contemplative vision. *Marsanes* structures the entire perceptible and intelligible universe as a hierarchy of thirteen "seals" or ontological levels. This use of the term "seal" implies a baptismal context, and, as in *Zostrianos*, these "seals" probably mark the stages of a celestial ascent rather than the progressive procedures of any this-worldly liturgical activity. Although there is no description of any explicit baptisms undergone by Marsanes, his declaration (X 2,12-16a) that he has "confirmed" or "established" the thirteenth seal appears to presuppose his receipt of all thirteen seals in serial during a visionary ascent. Moreover, a baptismal context—albeit a celestial one—is clearly present in X 65,21-66,5 where the terms "seal" (σφραγίς) and "sealing" (σφραγίζειν) occur; in X 64,19 the figure of Gamaliel, one of the "receivers" of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, introduces Marsanes to the vision the celestial "[fountain] of living water." Although the precise content and significance of this material is obscured by the physical deterioration of the manuscript, it appears that *Marsanes* is concerned to restrain the tendency toward exclusive attention to the realm of intelligible reality and first principles evident in *Allogenes* by invoking the baptismal imagery associated with more traditional Sethian metaphors for enlightenment.

All scholars who have had occasion to comment on *Marsanes* in relation to other Sethian literature have called attention to its unique postulation of a new supreme principle, the Unknown Silent One that transcends the Invisible Spirit, who is otherwise the supreme principle of all the other Sethian treatises. This modification of Sethian theology is parallel to a similar phenomenon (discussed in Chapter 10) that occurs in Iamblichus (cf. Damascius, *De principiis* 1.21,11-14; 25,21-22) and his disciple Theodore of Asine (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* II.274,10-20), who placed an ineffable One absolutely unrelated to anything else at the summit of all reality—including Plotinus' supreme One (which was at least related to subsequent reality)—perhaps as an extreme way of asserting the aseity of the Plotinian One by restoring it to a position above the noetic triad (where Porphyry had placed it; cf. Damascius, *Dub. et Sol.* I.86,3-15; 101,14-15; 103,6-10). Of course, at least in the case of *Marsanes* and Theodore, this supreme One never-

theless has some relation to its posteriors, since for Theodore, the "second One" was the aspiration ("breathing"), self-contact, and intelligibility of the first One, and for *Marsanes*, the Invisible Spirit (which "has no breath," X 15,1-4; 15,29-16,2) seems to share both the silence and the activity of the Unknown Silent One. On these grounds, one might date *Marsanes* to the late third or early fourth century, contemporary with Iamblichus and Theodore.

In *Marsanes*, these highest realities become the object of the visionary ascent. In *Zostrianos*, the visionary ascends through the celestial realm to the intellectual level of the Barbelo Aeon. In *Allogenes* the ascent does not terminate in the Barbelo Aeon, but continues through the levels of the Triple Power, culminating in a non-knowing, mentally vacant revelatory encounter with the Unknowable One at the summit of all. In *Marsanes*, however, there is no direct evidence of the negative theological predications of the highest realities found in the *Apocryphon of John*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes*, nor any clear claim, so central to *Allogenes*, to direct insight achieved through nescience. It is not clear whether Marsanes, although he certainly *sees* the three powers of the Triple Powered One and *sees* the supreme Unknown Silent One, is actually assimilated to those realities in quite the same way as was Allogenes, although it is clear that Marsanes does achieve assimilation at least with the Barbelo Aeon (X 10,7b-11a). Marsanes also achieves a vision of the supreme Unknown Silent One beyond even the Invisible Spirit, although this vision seems mediated (by the Invisible Spirit? X 16,3-5) Again, while the *Three Steles of Seth* presupposes a similar ascent to the supreme level resulting in "salvation," it is not clear that any ontological assimilation of the visionary with the supreme pre-existent One takes place.[9]

Thus in the four Platonizing Sethian treatises, no matter whether the visionary actually ascends only to the level of the Barbelo Aeon or in fact ascends beyond it, the net effect is that the Aeon of Barbelo has now become only a stage on the path of ascent to even higher principles. Yet, to a certain extent, the Barbelo Aeon still remains the initiator of the ascent, since in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* it is the "Luminaries of the

9. According to the *Three Steles of Seth* VII 124,18-19, the visionary attains the summit of reality ("We have beheld that which really preexists"), although VII 125,17 ("We have beheld you by means of Intellect") suggests that this vision was not immediate, but rather, more like Zostrianos' vision, was experienced at the level and through the mediation of Barbelo, the divine Intellect.

Barbelo Aeon" that guide Zostrianos and Allogenes to either a vision of or an assimilation to the principles that lie beyond the Barbelo Aeon, and in the *Three Steles of Seth* it is by means of the Barbelo Aeon that the supreme One is seen. It may be that this development is partially explained by a shift in Sethian preoccupations away from the story of their primordial origins and the sacred history of divine initiatives and interventions by Barbelo and Seth in their behalf toward a Platonic metaphysics in which the feminine, maternal principle was associated—even since the time of Plato—with the deficiency of the Dyad. Indeed, in *Marsanes*, the feminine "Virgin" Barbelo "becomes male" as "the (masculine!) Aeon" (X 9,1-2). To a certain extent, *Marsanes* and perhaps the *Three Steles of Seth* seem to reverse the trend towards this somewhat cold and impersonal portrayal of Barbelo in the other Platonizing Sethian treatises. *Marsanes* is unique among these treatises when it portrays the Aeon of Barbelo speaking directly to Marsanes, telling him to engage in silent contemplation of yet higher realities (X 8,18b-29) and informing him about the nature of the silent praise her aeon offered to the Triple Powered One on the occasion of its original manifestation (X 9,21-28). Even more striking is her direct address to Marsanes' followers through the figure of Marsanes (who has become assimilated to Barbelo as the Triple Powered One's third power) as mouthpiece, beckoning them to ascend above with the Invisible Spirit/Triple Powered One as they contemplate yet higher realities (X 10,12b-29).

Nevertheless, in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, the Father, Mother, Child nomenclature, perhaps originally inspired by Plato's *Timaeus*, becomes obsolete. It is not Barbelo's maternal characteristics as the merciful Mother and Womb of the All that are stressed; it is rather her status as the Knowledge or Intellect of the Invisible Spirit that is emphasized, an entity which Platonists traditionally treated in masculine terms as Intellect (νοῦς). She is no longer so much "Mother" or "Mother-Father" Barbelo as she is the masculine Aeon of Barbelo.

Among the Platonizing Sethian texts, *Marsanes* and the *Three Steles of Seth* do not seem to be mentioned in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* 16 as circulating in Plotinus' circle, although it does mention a revelation of Nicotheos, a figure who is mentioned in the Bruce Codex in concert with another revealer named Marsanes; this suggests that *Marsanes* may predate the untitled text of the Bruce Codex. If indeed its doctrine of the

Unknown Silent One beyond the supreme Invisible Spirit does reflect the metaphysics of Iamblichus, *Marsanes* should be dated to around 300 CE, well after *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*.

Overall, in terms of content, *Marsanes* seems most proximate to *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* as possible sources for its doctrine, but the degree of overlap is sufficiently narrow as to conclude that the author of *Marsanes* is widely read in extra-Sethian materials on such subjects as Platonic philosophy, grammatical theory and arithmological lore, and clearly a creative author in his or her own right. As a possible interpreter of *Zostrianos*, this author is certainly more innovative and wide-ranging than the author of *Allogenes* (for whom *Zostrianos* seems to have been the basic source). One may thus claim that the author of *Marsanes* read (among others) *Zostrianos*, whose author in turn certainly read the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, whose author in turn certainly had probably read the *Apocryphon of John* and perhaps the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.

The Hierarchy of *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes* according to the Order of the Thirteen Seals of *Marsanes*

Seal #			
13 (Silent One)	(only in *Marsanes*)		
12 Invisible Spirit	Existence		
11 Triple Power		Vitality	
10 Barbelo			Mentality
9 Kalyptos	(Aphredon, Diphaneus, Marsedon, Solmis) –	Youel?	
8 Protophanes (Harmedon)	(Solmis?)		
	Akremon	Zachthos Yachthos	
	Ambrosius	Setheus, Antiphantes	
	Se(l)men (Salamex, Armē)	Seldao, Elenos	
	Triple Male Child	Pigeradamas his eye	
7Autogenes	Autogenes + Meirothea	Autogenes ↓ Prophania	
	(Ger)Adamas + Prophania	Harmozel	
	Emmacha Seth + Plesithea	Oroiael	Child of Child
	Seed of Seth	Davithe	(Authrounios?)
	(Metanoia)	Eleleth	
6 The Autogeneis Aeons	Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus = Living Water		
	Micheus, Michar, Barpharanges, Seldao, Elenos, etc.		
5 Metanoia	(= the repentant Sophia?)		
4 Paroikesis	(= morally good souls?)		
3 Antitypoi	(= the Archons' realm?)		
2 Gē Aerodios	(=the sublunar atmosphere?)		
1 Kosmos Aisthetos	(= the 13 aeons?)		

E. *The Untitled Treatise of the Bruce Codex*

Finally, as previously mentioned, the untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex also belongs among the Sethian treatises, and seems to have affinity mostly with *Zostrianos* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. It is almost entirely devoted to an elaborate cosmology involving the transcendent Sethian *dramatis personae* arranged into various levels and groups called "fatherhoods" and "deeps" consisting of myriads of powers. It narrates the descent of the light-spark and Christ through Setheus, bearing a salvation which seems to be effected by the baptismal rite already discussed. It is by all standards a most complex work defying any simple analysis. I can do no more than state that Schmidt[10] has dated it to the end of the second century, although I would be inclined to put it closer to 325-350 CE, but for no reason other than its extraordinary prolixity in comparison with the other Sethian treatises.

Nevertheless, Bruce *Untitled* contains important Sethian traditions. Thus, this treatise knows of the existence of *Marsanes* and perhaps of a treatise of Nicotheos otherwise mentioned only by Porphyry (*Vita Plotini* 16):

> "The powers (δύναμις) of all the great aeons (αἰών) worshipped the power (δύναμις) which is in Marsanes. They said 'Who is this who has seen these things in his very presence, that on his account he (the Monogenes "hidden" in Setheus) appeared in this way!' Nikotheos spoke of him (i.e. Monogenes) and saw him, that he is that One. He said, 'The Father who surpasses every perfect being (τέλειος), and has revealed the invisible (ἀόρατος) perfect (τέλειος) Triple-Power (τριδύναμις).' Each of the perfect (τέλειος) men saw him and spoke of him, giving him glory, each according to (κατά) his own manner." (Codex Bruce, *Untitled*, ch. 7, 235,14-23 Schmidt-MacDermot)

It thus appears that the untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex was dependent upon a document attributed to Nicotheos which in turn seems to have depended at least in part upon at least the first part of *Marsanes* that summarizes the doctrine of the paternal "perfect Invisible Triple Powered One" noted by Nicotheos. Although Nicotheos preserves only this short excerpt of *Marsanes*, the untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex shows other, mainly terminological, affinities with *Marsanes*, in particu-

10. C. SCHMIDT, *Gnostische Schriften in koptischer Sprache aus dem Codex Brucianus* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literature 8; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1892), 664.

lar the incessant use of the epithet "Triple Powered." One thus wonders whether its author may have derived even more ideas from *Marsanes*. Since much of the distinctive doctrine of *Marsanes*, especially the section on the properties of the letters of the alphabet and *Marsanes*' peculiar doctrine of the emanation of the Barbelo Aeon does not appear in the (likewise fragmentary!) untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex, it likely that its author had indirect—probably through Nicotheos—rather than direct access to *Marsanes*. There are two other passages that could reasonably suggest some dependence on *Marsanes* or a digest of it:

> And the triple-powered one came down to the places of the Autogenes. And they saw the grace of the aeons of the light which was granted to them. They rejoiced because he who exists came forth among them. Then the veils opened, and the light penetrated down to the matter below and to those who had no form and no likeness. And in this way they acquired the likeness of the light. Some indeed rejoiced because the light came to them and they became rich. Others wept because they became poor, and those things which they had were taken away. (Codex Bruce, *Untitled* ch. 8, 239,12-21 Schmidt-MacDermot)

Compare *Marsanes* X 7,24-8,11 and X 9,29-10,7:

> **X 7** [24] And the One (the Unknown Silent One) who [25] exists, who is silent, [who is] [26] beyond [insubstantiality], [27] manifested [the Triple] [28] [Powered, First-] [29] Perfect One. [When he appeared] **8** [1] to the powers, they rejoiced. [2] Those that are within me were completed [3] together with all the [4] rest. And they all blessed [5] the Triple Powered One, [6] one by one, who [7] is [the] First-Perfect One, [8] [blessing] him in purity, [every]where [9] praising the Lord [10] [who exists] before the All, [11] [who (is) the] Triple Powered One.
>
> **9** [29] [Again] the Invisible [Spirit] **10** [1] ran up [2] to his place. The entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm) [3] was revealed, the entire place unfolded [4] <until> he reached the upper region. [5] Again he went forth and caused the [6] entire place to be illuminated, and the entire [7] place was illuminated.

Again, the following passage in the Bruce untitled treatise seems to be influenced by the doctrine of supreme principles in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, perhaps *Marsanes*:

> But outside the indivisible one and outside his characterless ennead, in which are all characters, there are three other enneads, and each one makes nine enneads. And within each one there is a rule, to which three fatherhoods are gathered: an infinite one, an unutterable one and an incomprehensible one. And in the midst of the second (ennead) there is a rule, and there are three fatherhoods in it: an invisible one, an unbegotten one and an unmoved one. Also in the third (ennead) there is a rule, and there are three fatherhoods in it: a still one, an unknowable one, and a triple-powered one. (Codex Bruce, *Untitled* ch. 10, 243,3-13 Schmidt-MacDermot)

Although these are not ultimate principles, this passage depicts a sequence of triadic enneads whose nomenclature, particularly the italicized terms, is highly reminiscent of *Marsanes*' Unknown Silent One, Invisible Spirit, and Triple Powered One:

First Ennead	Infinite	*Unutterable*	Incomprehensible
Second Ennead	*Invisible*	Unbegotten	Immobile
Third Ennead	Stable	Unknowable	*Triple Powered*

Thus there is at best an indirect influence of *Marsanes* on the Bruce treatise, while there does seem to be reliable testimony that it was read by Nicotheos, who is also mentioned by Porphyry (*Vita Plotini* 16) alongside Zostrianos and Allogenes as having produced "revelations."

Immediately following Nicotheos' citation of *Marsanes*, there is another testimony concerning an otherwise unknown Phosilampes whose teaching, however, may be reflected in *Zostrianos*' teaching on the character of the Kalyptos Aeon:

> This is the only-begotten of whom Phosilampes spoke: "He exists before the All." It is he who came forth from the endless, characterless, patternless and self-begotten (αὐτογενής) one who has begotten himself, who came forth from the ineffable and immeasurable one, who exists verily and truly. It is he in whom exists the truly existent one; that is to say, the incomprehensible Father exists in his only-begotten Son. The All rests in the ineffable and unutterable, unruled and untroubled one, of whose divinity—which is itself no divinity—no one is able to speak. And when Phosilampes understood, he said: "On account of him are those things which really and truly exist and those which do not exist truly. This is he on whose account are those that truly exist which are hidden, and those that do not exist truly which are manifest." (Codex Bruce, *Untitled* ch. 6, 237,20-23 [Schmidt-MacDermot])

Compare *Zostrianos*:

> **VIII 117** [10] True light (is there), as well as [11] enlightened darkness (i.e. intelligible matter) together with [12] that which truly is non-existent (i.e. gross matter), [13] that [which] is not-truly existent (i.e. souls), [14] [as well as] the non-existent ones that are not at all (i.e. sensibles).

In addition, Bruce *Untitled* (Ch. 4, 263,11-264,6 cited in Chapter 3, p. 111) contains an extensive inventory of the beings populating the

spiritual world as it is found in *Zostrianos*; these and other names of Sethian *dramatis personae* are scattered elsewhere in this anonymous treatise, among them Aphredon, Mousanios, Loia, Youel, Paralemptor, Adamas the Man of Light, Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes, Setheus, Father, Mother, Son, Triple Powered One, etc. but never that of Barbelo or the Invisible Spirit!

F. Plotinus and the Sethians

When one realizes that *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* are probably to be included in the "apocalypses of Zoroaster and Zostrianos and Nicotheos and Allogenes and Messos and those of other such figures" (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16) whose doctrine was scrutinized by Plotinus, Amelius and Porphyry in the period 244-269 CE,[11] one is led to date *Zostrianos*

11. See J. M. ROBINSON, "The Three Steles of Seth and the Gnostics of Plotinus," in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism*, Stockholm, *August 20-25, 1973*, ed. G. Widengren (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1977), 132-142; C. SCHMIDT, *Plotins Stellung zum Gnosticismus und kirchlichen Christentum* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 20; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1901); C. ELSAS, *Neuplatonische und gnostische Weltablehnung in der Schule Plotins* (Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 34; Berlin and New York: W. de Gruyter, 1975); B. A. PEARSON, "The Tractate Marsanes (NHC X) and the Platonic Tradition," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 373-384; A. H. ARMSTRONG, "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 87-124; J. D. TURNER, "Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Texts from Nag Hammadi in their Relation to Later Platonic Literature," in *Gnosticism and Neoplatonism*, ed. R. T. Wallis and J. Bregman (Studies in Neoplatonism 6; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 425-459; the unpublished paper of R. T. WALLIS, "Plotinus and the Gnostics: The Nag Hammadi Texts," unpublished paper of 1984 (23 pp.); M. TARDIEU, "Recherches sur la formation de l'Apocalypse de Zostrien et les sources de Marius Victorinus", 7-114 and P. HADOT, "'Porphyre et Victorinus.' Questions et hypothèses", 117-125 in *Res Orientales IX* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1996); L. BRISSON, "The Platonic Background in the *Apocalypse of Zostrianos*" in *The Tradition of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon*, ed. J. J. Cleary (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 173-188; and J. D. TURNER, "Introduction" and "Commentary" in C. Barry, W.-P. Funk, and P.-H. Poirier, and J. D. Turner, *Zostrien (NH VIII, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 24; Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000), 32-225, 483-662.

and *Allogenes* in the first half of the third century.[12] Furthermore, as we shall see, in his antignostic *Großschrift* (*Enn.* III.8; V.8; V.5 and II.9, chronologically 30-33), Plotinus probably has these tractates, especially *Zostrianos*, in view.[13] A more detailed study of this complex issue will be attempted in a later chapter, but this should be enough for now to establish at least the plausibility that *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* were the works that Plotinus, Amelius, and Porphyry actually read and critiqued, and that these and perhaps other Sethian works circulated in and around his Roman seminar. While it seems reasonable to place the composition of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* in the period 200-250, the other two are more difficult to locate: the date of the *Three Steles of Seth* seems indeterminate, while *Marsanes* seems to come slightly later than *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*.

G. The Relative Positions of the Platonizing Sethian Treatises

The precise textual interrelationships within the group of Platonizing Sethian treatises are difficult to determine. All four texts show no interest in the Sethite primeval history, but they continue to trade in the traditional nomenclature for the denizens of the divine world found in the part of the *Apocryphon of John* that overlaps the Barbeloite account of Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* I.29) and which is also found in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, the Autogenes Son, and the Four Luminaries; only *Zostrianos* tells the story of Sophia and the Archon's creative efforts). Even more obviously, none of these texts show any distinctive Christian influence.

Within this text group, it presently appears that *Zostrianos* is the earliest. Its extensive use of traditional Sethian baptismal mythologumena places it in closer proximity to an older, ritually-oriented form of Sethianism reflected in texts like the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. As we shall see in Chapters 12 and 16, of the four

12. *Allogenes* should also be included among the various Sethian works "under the name of Allogenes" mentioned by Epiphanius around 375 CE (*Panarion* 39.5.1; 40.2.2).

13. The *Großschrift* is the originally integral antignostic treatise that Porphyry distributed among various of the *Enneads* into which he divided Plotinus' literary remains, as first recognized by R. HARDER, "Eine neue Schrift Plotins," *Hermes* 71 (1936), 1-10, reprinted in *Kleine Schriften*, ed. W. Marg (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1960), 257-274.

Platonizing Sethian treatises, it is *Zostrianos*' conception of the supreme deity that is closest to that found in treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*: it maintains a much higher degree of identity between the supreme Invisible Spirit inherited from past Sethian tradition and the supreme One beyond being recently adopted from Middle Platonic interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*, whereas *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* tend to identify the Invisible Spirit with the Triple Powered One at a level just below that of the supreme Unknowable One, and the *Three Steles of Seth* omits altogether the name of the Invisible Spirit in favor of designating the pre-existent One as a "living Spirit" and identifying the Triple Powered One with the Barbelo Aeon. *Zostrianos* also contains a number of features not present in the other three treatises, features which are singled out for criticism and ridicule by Plotinus in his second *Ennead*: the story of Sophia's "fall;" many instances of glossolalia; frequent lists of multiple divine beings whose names may have seemed to have magical import; and various technical terms denoting levels of reality in addition to those of the Invisible Spirit and the tripartite Barbelo Aeon, such as the Antitypoi, the Paroikesis, the Metanoia and the Ethereal Earth. Since such features were critiqued by Plotinus himself in *Ennead* II, 9, and since Amelius composed a 40 volume refutation of the same work (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16), one might surmise that *Allogenes* was composed as a refinement of *Zostrianos* which would be more acceptable to the circle of Plotinus through a clearer and more accurate and technical exposition of the ontology and visionary ascent basic to *Zostrianos* freed from its objectionable excesses. Indeed, *Allogenes* explicitly represents even the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon as being ignorant about the existence of any spiritual powers other than the Unknowable One, the Invisible Spirit, the Triple Powered One, and the tripartite Barbelo-Aeon; to seek beyond these is a "waste of time" (XI 67,22-35). Perhaps in like spirit, the author of *Allogenes* designated his work as the "seal of all the books of Allogenes" (XI 69,17-19; cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 31.75;31.82), that is, as a final instance and corrected summary of *Zostrianos* and perhaps the *Three Steles of Seth* and other Platonizing treatises no longer extant. On this construction, *Zostrianos* would constitute either an early witness to a break with Christian Sethianism in favor of an alliance with religious Platonism, or even a direct continuation of an early Barbeloite baptismal theology

along a trajectory that by-passed Christianity altogether. *Marsanes* would represent a continuation of this trend in an even more theurgical direction, while *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth* would represent a break with the baptismal theology in favor of developing and clarifying a praxis of contemplative ascent structured according to the traditional Barbeloite theogony, but now articulated exclusively along the lines of a Neopythagorean and Middle Platonic ontology similar to that found in the *Chaldaean Oracles* and other Middle Platonic texts.

We shall attempt to justify this sequencing in subsequent chapters. But whatever the facts of the matter may have been, assuming that these textual comparisons are not to be explained by dependencies upon versions of texts to which we have no access, it is clear that the four Platonizing Sethian texts represent a departure from a Christian Sethianism fundamentally informed by the baptismal rite and the Sethite primeval history. Such a departure would be most likely occasioned by a Christian rejection of the Sethian interpretation of the significance of Christ, namely that Christ is the pre-existent Son of Barbelo and the Invisible Spirit, and that his appearance in the guise of Jesus is to be explained as the form in which Barbelo appeared on her third descent as the Logos who conferred the celestial baptismal rite of the Five Seals. In such a situation, the authors of the Platonizing Sethian treatises may have been induced to seek a less mythological and Christian interpretation of the transcendental theology of the Barbeloite tradition than that offered by the baptismal conceptuality or by the Sethite speculation on Genesis 1-6 typical of such texts as the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. The most hospitable environment for such a venture would have been that wing of contemporary Neopythagorean Platonism represented by Philo of Alexandria, Numenius, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and whoever else was committed to the Platonic philosophical articulation of biblical and other traditional wisdom.

II. The Literary History of the Sethian Corpus

Taking into account the preceding observations on the evidence of redaction and mutual dependence among the Sethian treatises, both those of the ascent and of the descent pattern, it ought to be possible to hypothesize a stemma or history of development of these treatises. Certainly the foundational building blocks of the doctrine of these treatises

are to be located in Jewish traditions, both those about the divine Wisdom—appropriated by both Christians and Sethians—and those concerning the "true" interpretation of the first chapters of Genesis. Wisdom traditions clearly underlie the figure of Providence in the Pronoia monologue concluding the *Apocryphon of John* and the closely-related aretalogical triptych on the salvific descents of the divine First Thought in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, not to mention the cosmogony set in motion by Sophia, the errant divine Wisdom. Likewise, interpretations of Genesis underlie the anthropogony of the "Ophite" source described by Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* I.30), the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and the *Apocalypse of Adam*, all of which contain virtual rewritings of the Genesis narrative. In addition to these cosmogonic, anthropogonic, and soteriological portions of the Sethian myths, there is also of course the question of the mythical origin of wisdom herself, which constitutes an important episode in the account of the origin of the divine world itself narrated in the theogonical component of these myths.

In order to reconstruct a history of the composition of the Sethian treatises, a beginning point needs to be established. It has already been noted that the earliest (mid-second century or earlier) instances of Sethian compositions are likely to be the self-contained hymn on the three descents of the divine Pronoia found at the end of the longer versions of the *Apocryphon of John* (II, 30,11-31,25) and the Barbeloite theogony sketched by Irenaeus in his *Adversus Haereses* I.29, which is clearly the precursor of the theogony found in the presently extant versions of the *Apocryphon of John*. Furthermore, another such precursor to the anthropogony and soteriological narrative occupying the second half of the *Apocryphon of John* may be the myth that Irenaeus' immediately succeeding chapter (*Adversus Haereses* I.30) attributes to certain "others" whom Theodoret identified as "Ophites." One might well wonder, then, whether there might be still other early sources that may have influenced the composition of these earliest Sethian treatises. One such source that comes to mind is of course *Eugnostos the Blessed* (III,*3* and V,*1*), which, though it does not conform to the general typology of Sethian literature outlined in Chapter 2, may very well be pre-Sethian, and contains a theogony that features a triad of beings reminiscent of prominent figures in Sethianism: Immortal Man, Adam the Son of Man, and, as Savior, the son of the Son of Man.

As an initial step toward establishing a possible sequence for the composition of the Sethian treatises, then, it will be useful to briefly consider Irenaeus' Ophite myth and *Eugnostos the Blessed*.

A. Two Possible Non-Sethian Precursors of the Sethian Treatises

1. The (Sethian?) Ophites of Irenaeus, Haereses *I.30*

In the previous chapter, it was noted that the anthropogonical and soteriological section of the *Apocryphon of John*, while it has no close parallel in Irenaeus' "Barbeloite" summary, does in fact have a very close parallel in the anthropogony and soteriology of a myth that Irenaeus' immediately succeeding chapter (*Adversus Haereses* I.30) attributes to certain "others" whom Theodoret identified as "Ophites." Indeed, it may be that the similar material shared by this myth and by the second section of the *Apocryphon of John* goes back to a common source.[14]

In the Ophite myth, one finds a triad of highest beings: The high deity (First) Man is Father of All. His Thought (ἔννοια) which proceeds from him is the Son of Man. Below these is the Holy Spirit, the Mother of the Living, from whom the First Man and his son beget Christ, the "Third Male" (*tertius masculus*; cf. the Sethian epithet of Barbelo "Triple Male" and the separate figure of the Triple Male [Child] in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*). The Spirit emits (by overflow "on the left") the androgynous Sophia-Prunicos, who by gravity and without any trace of moral culpability descends and agitates the waters below, taking on a material body. When she is empowered from above to escape this body and ascend to the height, her abandoned body fathers the Archon Yaldabaoth.[15] At this point, the parallels with the account in the *Apocryphon of John* become numerous: the Archon produces seven sons with the same names as in the *Apocryphon of John*, and boasts that he alone is God, to which his mother responds that "Man and the Son of Man" are above him. Then follows the making of the man and the

14. See, e.g., A. H. B. LOGAN, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 276-277.

15. Once Sophia ascends to the eighth heaven, she implores her mother, the Holy Spirit, to send aid in the form of her brother Christ, who descends upon Jesus, leaving him to die on the cross, while he reascends with his sister Sophia to the imperishable aeon.

woman in the Garden, their enlightenment through Sophia's tricking the Archon to breathe the power he stole from her into Adam's nostrils, and the stories of the Archon's attempted rape of Eve, the eating of the tree of gnosis, the expulsion from Paradise, the birth of Cain and Abel, Seth, and Norea (all of whom are plunged into idolatry and contempt), and the story of their salvation from the flood through Noah's ark. The final act in this account is Sophia's entreaty that the Mother on high send aid, which comes in the form of the incognito descent of Christ, the Third Male, through the seven heavens, who puts on his sister Sophia and rescues the crucified Jesus (as does the Logos in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*). Just as the Barbeloite material features repeated salvific manifestations of Barbelo through her manifestation as the divine Pronoia or Epinoia, so too this "Sethian-Ophite" myth describes repeated salvific acts effected through Sophia: providing the divine model for the protoplast, the enlightenment of Eve, the protection of her light-trace from conception through the Archon, revealing the bitter significance of Adam and Eve's bodies, aiding the conception of Seth and Norea and the birth of the wise Jesus who together with Sophia is ultimately redeemed by Christ. The very close parallels between this Ophite myth and the second half of the *Apocryphon of John* suggest that they both derive from a common parent that was probably composed in the first half of the second century. The Ophite theogony may be presented in tabular form as follows:

The Ophite system of Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30

1. First Man / Father
2. Son of Man / Thought
3. Holy Spirit / Mother
4. Christ / Third Male 5. Androgynous Sophia Prunicos
6. Yaldabaoth

2. Eugnostos the Blessed

Eugnostos the Blessed (III,*3* and V,*1*) is a non-Christian didactic letter that gradually shifts into a revelation discourse. At some point, almost its entire content, with a few minor exceptions and one major one, was incorporated into the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (NHC III,*4* and BG 8502,*3*), a post-resurrection dialogue between Jesus and his twelve disciples on a mountain in Galilee, which concludes with an appended summary—

reminiscent of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*—of the creation of humanity by Yaldabaoth from Sophia's emission of a drop of light.

According to the extant texts of *Eugnostos*, there is a pentad of male principles: 1) the consortless Propator who is unbegotten; 2) the consortless first-appearing Autopator who is self-begetter; 3) Immortal Man or Perfect Intellect who is begetter, together with his consort, All-wise begettress Sophia; 4) Son of God (or, in III 85,9-14—a section apparently beginning a new source—called "Son of Man," that is, the luminous Adam as son of the Immortal Man God), who is first-begetter, together with his consort, first-begettress Sophia, "the Mother of the All;" and 5) their son "all-begetter Savior" identified (in V 13,12-13 alone) as "Son of the Son of Man"—who would be Seth, although no such name is provided—together with his consort, all-begettress Sophia. The ultimate principle, the unbegotten Propator, is said to conceive the second principle, Autopator, by a process of self-reflection as in a mirror; in III 76,13-19 it is said that this second principle "first appeared in the Unlimited" (ἀπέραντον).[16] This second, self-generated (αὐτοφυής) principle, Autopator, in turn produces the third principle, "first-begetter Nous," the androgynous Immortal Man, together with his female aspect, "all-wise begettress Sophia," also identified as "Truth" and perhaps "Ennoia," by "intelligizing its ἀρχή," presumably the supreme Propator. Unlike the Sethian divine triad, the two highest levels of *Eugnostos* each contain a sole male principle; on the other hand the subsequent three male principles, Man, Son of Man, and Son of the Son of Man, though lacking a maternal figure, are somewhat closer in conception to—and may have been borrowed from—the Sethian trinity, except that they each have an androgynous aspect or consort and occupy a lower rank, thus serving to define the first three aeons. Feminine principles bearing the name Sophia are joined with the series of the latter three male principles beginning at the third ontological level; only at the fourth level is the figure of the "Mother" introduced as consort of the Son of Man, Adamas.

The author of *Eugnostos* is well acquainted with contemporary Greek philosophical concepts; he employs Neopythagorean speculation on the tetraktys (III 78,15-24), provides a negative theology of the Propator modeled on the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, explicitly distin-

16. ⲡⲉϩⲟⲩⲉⲓⲧ ⲛ̄ⲧⲁϥⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ (cf. the Sethian Protophanes).

guishes his doctrine from that of other contemporary philosophical schools, and, according to R. Van den Broek, applies Plato's notion that Mind and Truth derive from the Good who is beyond being (*Republic* VI 490B and VII 509B-517B) to the production of Immortal Man and "all-wise begettress Sophia" (called respectively Mind and Truth) from the Autopator.[17] Moreover, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (III 96,21-97,16) models the Propator's generation of the aeons on the figure of the ungrudging demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus*. This demonstrable influence of Greek philosophy seems to be mediated to *Eugnostos* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* through Hellenistic Jewish speculation upon the concept of God's personified Wisdom, and upon traditions derived from Genesis 1-5 concerning the mutual sharing of the divine image between the supreme deity and the two sons begotten in his image, Adam and Seth.

The theogony of *Eugnostos the Blessed* may be presented in tabular form as follows:

The Theogony of *Eugnostos the Blessed*

	– Male –	– Female –
Agennetos	Propator	
Autogenetor	Autopator	
Genetor	Immortal Man	Pansophos Sophia
Protogenetor	Son of Man / Adamas	Protogeneteira Sophia / Mother of All
Pangenetor	Son of Son of Man / Savior	Pangeneteira Sophia (= "Pistis")

12 Powers in the types of their predecessors:

Agennetos	Pansophos Sophia
Autogennetos(or)	Panmeter Sophia
Genetor	Pangeneteira Sophia
Protogenetor	Protogeneteira Sophia
Pangenetor	Agape Sophia
Archigenetor	Pistis Sophia

Ekklesia
(in *Soph. Jes. Chr.* Archigenetor = Yaldabaoth)

17. Cf. R. VAN DEN BROEK, "Jewish and Platonic Speculations in Early Alexandrian Theology: Eugnostos, Philo, Valentinus, and Origen" in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. B. A. Pearson and J. E. Goehring (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 190-203. By this means, Alexandrian Jewish speculation was led to identify the Jewish Anthropos and personified Wisdom respectively with Mind and Truth. Adopting this identification, the author of *Eugnostos* goes on to identify the subsequent pair, Son of Man and First-begettress Sophia, the all-mother, with the ideal Adam and Eve / Zôê, the aeonic mother of the living. Broek also shows that Valentinus adopted his primal tetrad of Mind, Truth, Word and Life from an *interpretatio platonica* of the primal tetrad Anthropos, Sophia, Adam(as) and Zôê such as one finds in *Eugnostos*.

Here, the three highest beings are masculine, while the figure of the Mother at the fourth level is introduced as consort of Adamas, who is not identified as a father (e.g. of Seth), but merely as Son of Man. This of course leaves no room for a supreme Father, Mother, and Child triad of the Sethian type. On the other hand, *Eugnostos* does feature a whole series of feminine beings under the name of Sophia who are regarded as the female aspects or consorts of all male beings from the level of the third primal principle on down the scale of being.[18]

In fact, there are certain inconsistencies in the system of *Eugnostos* that cause one to suspect that the author may have begun with a supreme Man, Son of Man, Son of the Son of Man triad in which the two highest members were associated with a feminine aspect which the author has suppressed in favor of a masculinized philosophical monism.[19] The fact

18. This scheme resembles the Platonic conception of multiple feminine principles of indefiniteness associated at each major ontological level with corresponding masculine principles of definiteness and limitation, perhaps originated in the old Academy by Plato's nephew Speusippus.

19. This is suggested by an episode (III 82,7-83,1) that follows the main theogony according to which the lowest pair of transcendent principles, all-begetter Savior and all-begettress Sophia, produced a dodecad of twelve equally paired powers, six male and six female. The male member of each pair except the last—Archigenetor has no equivalent among the transcendent principles—bears the same epithet as the five prior male principles, and the female member of each of the six pairs bears the name Sophia (namely, Unbegotten One and All-wise Sophia, Self-begetter and All-mother Sophia, Begetter and All-begetter Sophia, First-begetter and First-begetter Sophia, All-begetter and Love Sophia, and sixth, Archigenetor and Pistis Sophia). In the list of these twelve powers, the male Unbegotten One is paired with All-wise Sophia and the male Self-begetter is paired with All-mother Sophia, in contradiction to the preceding main theogony, which portrays the unbegotten Propator and the self-begetter Autopator as lacking female counterparts. Propator is explicitly said to have no origin (ἀρχή), but is instead the origin of all who come from him. He is said to "see himself (within himself) in the manner of a mirror or of an idea (ἰδέα), which appears like him, as Autopator" (III 75,3-6). Such a reflective medium is the means of Barbelo's generation in the *Apocryphon of John*, and seems to function much like Plato's Receptacle or Unlimited (Dyad) in which copies or images of the ideas are generated. Thus, while not introducing an explicit maternal principle at the ontological summit, *Eugnostos* comes close to presupposing the presence of something else of feminine gender (ἰδέα in III 76,14-16 called "the Unlimited") alongside the Unbegotten Propator. Subsequently, Autopator produces Immortal Man by "intelligizing (νοεῖν) the origin (ἀρχή, perhaps the Propator) in order that it might become a great power, and immediately the ἀρχή of that light appeared as Immortal Androgynous Man" (III 76,19-24). This conception is close to, though not identical with, the Neoplatonic doctrine of contemplative reversion. Only at the third level of the ex-

that the twelve powers located below the first five levels of being are composed of six male/female pairs and are said to be types of their priors (III 82,9-10), suggests that the author has made use of an alternative scheme that envisioned six highest levels of being in which each male principle was originally paired with a feminine principle, including the two highest ones, Propator and Autopator. In an effort to reconcile this scheme with a triad of supreme males, it may be that the author has omitted the sixth pair altogether, unlinked the two highest feminine principles from their original male counterparts, and relinked them at a point two levels down.[20] The result is that the two highest male principles now stand alone without consorts, Pansophos Sophia becomes the mate of Immortal Man, and Protogeneteira Sophia becomes the Mother of the All and consort of Adamas the Son of Man, while the two lowest of the original five female counterparts Agape Sophia and Pistis Sophia (who however may have been re-linked with the higher Pangeneteira Sophia, cf. V 10,12 and III 82,6-7) have been demoted from the rank of highest principles altogether.[21]

plicitly androgynous begetter Savior is there introduced a female counterpart, allwise begettress Sophia—who in the list of 12 powers is paired with an Unbegotten male power—and only at the fourth level is there a female figure called "Mother." Clearly, something is amiss here.

20. D. M. PARROTT ("Gnosticism and Egyptian Religion," *Novum Testamentum* 29 [1987], 73-93) arrives at a similar analysis, suggesting that a Sethian editor identified the third, fourth and fifth beings of an original hexad of gods with the triad Man (i.e., First Man), Son of Man (i.e., Adamas), and Son of the Son of Man (i.e., Seth) and omitted the sixth being, Archigenetor, since to have included this term would have been to admit the ignorant creator god of Sethian tradition into the ranks of supreme beings. Parrott traces this original pattern of six primal deities to a (Ramesside period) Theban interpretation of the ancient Hermopolitan theology modified to yield a hexad of gods, the self-generated and consortless Atum, who gives rise to a consortless secondary creator, who in turn engenders four pairs of male and female gods. See also *IDEM*, "Introduction" to *Eugnostos* in *Nag Hammadi codices III, 3-4 and V, 1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,3 and Oxyrhynchus papyrus 1081*: *Eugnostos and The Sophia of Jesus Christ*, ed. D. M. Parrott (Nag Hammadi Studies 27; Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1991).

21. Such a process may indicate that the author, perhaps under the influence of Jewish monotheism or Neopythagorean speculation on the tetractys of the sort found elsewhere in the text (III 78,15-23), wanted to adopt a metaphysical monism as opposed to any form of dualism that might be implied by the supreme principles with consorts. An even more powerful motivation to demote the figure of Pistis Sophia in particular may have been the myth of Sophia's "fall." Thus in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (II 87,1-11; 94,4-95,13), Pistis Sophia is the mother of the evil

B. The Beginnings of Sethian Theology: the Members of the Divine Triad

Already in the Ophite myth, there is a primal triad of transcendent male figures, First Man, the Son of Man, and the Third Male, Christ. The first two males are accompanied by a female figure, the Holy Spirit, Mother of the living, from whom they produce the Third Male and his sister, Sophia-Prunicos. *Eugnostos the Blessed* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* place a similar transcendent triad of males at a slightly lower level, Immortal Man, the Son of Man Adamas, and the Son of the Son of Man. D. M. Parrott has shown that in *Eugnostos* the third emanation from the Forefather was actually Seth.[22] Here the series of the highest transcendental beings emanating from the unbegotten Father are: his androgynous image, Immortal Man; Immortal Man's androgynous Son, Son of Man; and Son of Man's androgynous Son, the savior. This derives from an esoteric Jewish exegesis of Genesis 1-4 in which God was the Immortal Man, Adam was the Son of the Immortal Man, Seth was the Son of the Son of Man, and Eve was the female aspect of these androgynous figures, reconceived as Sophia or Pistis Sophia. Although the model-image relation of Gen 1:26 would encourage an identification of Immortal Man with the supreme God, this role is occupied by two still higher figures, Propator and Autopator. *Eugnostos the Blessed* offers no soteriology, but in both the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* and in Irenaeus' Ophite myth, the chief figure who presides over the origin and enlightenment of the earthly protoplasts is Sophia, while the eschatological savior is a male figure, respectively Immortal Man or the Third Male.

archon creator, a myth clearly reflected in the longer ending to *Eugnostos* appended by the author of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (III 114,14-25 + BG 118,14-120,1), although here it is not *Pistis* Sophia, but the Mother of the All—who would be *Protogennetos* Sophia, the consort of Son of Man/Adamas, who not only gives rise—without her consort—to the Archigenetor Yaldabaoth, but also—with her consort Immortal Man—aids in Adam's enlightenment. *Eugnostos*, then, seems to witness a "pre-Sethian" stage in the mythology of Wisdom at a point just before she is explicitly credited with the origin of the lower world.

22. D. M. PARROTT, "Evidence of Religious Syncretism in Gnostic Texts from Nag Hammadi," in *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity: Essays in Conversation with Geo Widengren*, ed. B. A. Pearson (Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1975), 173-189.

1. The Ambiguity of the Second Member of the Triad: Male or Female?

Like these precursors, the Sethians too ascribed the salvific initiatives of the divine in this world to the activity of a supreme Mother, now named Barbelo, Pronoia, or Protennoia. As a wisdom figure who was the consort or immediate self-reflection of supreme deity, she had enlightened Adam, Seth, and his seed in primordial times, and would also initiate the sending of a savior at the end time. Generally, the evidences of this Mother's activity were localized in 1) the manifestation of the archetypal image in which Adam was created, in 2) the further enlightenment of Adam as the Epinoia appearing as the spiritual Eve, or the tree of Gnosis, or the mother of Seth, or as Norea to save his seed from the flood, and in 3) the sending of the eschatological savior, usually a male (the Logos, Seth, or Christ). But while their precursors seemed to have maintained a supreme triad of male principles based on the Genesis-inspired "image of God" relation shared between God, Adam, and Seth, the Sethians took the step of introducing a female member into this triad, thus effecting a family triad of Father-Mother-Child, whose nomenclature might have found additional warrant in the other great protological text of the time, Plato's *Timaeus* (esp. 48E-52D), where Plato compared the Forms, the Receptacle, and the phenomenal images produced therein to a triad of primal principles, Father/Forms, Mother/Nurse of becoming, and Child/Image. Such an arrangement would amount to a more appealing way of conceiving salvation as the work of a nurturing Mother than was the masculine nomenclature of the triad Man (the high deity), Son of Man (the heavenly Adam) and Son of the Son of Man or Third Male (Seth) as in the Ophite myth, *Eugnostos*, and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*.

In a sense, the Ophite myth had already prepared the way for this substitution by conceiving its second principle, the masculine son of Man, as the—grammatically feminine—Ennoia or thought of the supreme First Man, thereby already introducing a certain ambiguity into the gender of the second principle. The apparent contradiction is easily resolved by considering the second principle as neither specifically male nor female, but as bisexual or androgynous. In Sethian mythology, this androgyny is reflected in the alternate but equivalent designations of the Mother Barbelo as male Virgin, womb, Father of the all, first Man, Triple Male, and so on. Note, for example, how the second part of the

longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* prefers to designate Barbelo-Pronoia as Mother-Father (II 5,7; 19,17; 20,9; 27,33) instead of the simpler designation "merciful Mother" of the shorter version (which, however has "Mother-Father" in BG 75,11, at the point where the longer version introduces Pronoia and her triple descent). Another instance of androgyny is the name Meirothea: According to the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 49,1-16) and *Zostrianos* (VIII 6,30; 30,4-20; 51,8-11), Mirothoe/Meirothea is the mother of the "first man" Adamas. And the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 38,7-16) directly identifies Meirothea with Protennoia/Barbelo, "the Mother (as well as) the Light which she appointed as Virgin, she who is called Meirothea, the incomprehensible Womb." Yet in the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 119,11-12), Seth can name his Mirotheid father Pigeradamas as his own Mirotheos. This divine being, whose name is attested in both masculine (Mirotheos) and feminine (Mirothea, Mirothoe) form—usually taken to mean "destiny god/goddess" (μοιρο-θεός), but more likely "divine anointed one" (μυρο-θεός)—seems to be essentially androgynous, designating not only the mother of the divine Adam Pigeradamas, but the divine Pigeradamas himself; (s)he is simultaneously father, mother and offspring.[23]

23. Incidentally, it should be noted that the Naasene Gnostics described by Hippolytus likewise know of or are on the way to some form of the Father-Mother-Child interpretation of the highest divine beings. Hippolytus (*Ref.* V.6.4-5; 7.2; 7.14; 7.30; 7.33) stresses that the basis of their system is a pair: the bisexual Man Adamas, who is invoked as Father and Mother and is himself tripartitioned (cf. the Sethian Triple Male), and the Son of Man, identified as Christ. Of course, the Naasene myth reflected in this "Sermon" is highly complex and involves much more besides, apparently adopting also the "Simonian" *Megale Apophasis* (*Ref.* V.9.5). But it seems that in the movements which revered the serpent, the Ophites and the Naasenes, there was a tendency at work to move from a bisexual Man, a Son of Man and a third Male to the more "familial" conception of a bisexual Man conceived as Father and Mother with a son called the Son of Man. Since these groups were Christianized, it may have been conceptually difficult for Christian Sethians to move to a full Father, Mother, Son triad, since Christianity in the wake of Paul had room only for a Father and a Son of Man or Son of David or Son of God; the status of the Spirit would have been ambiguous, since Paul tended to identify it with Christ. On the other hand, the originally non-Christian Sethians, with their emphasis on Sophia, Eve and Norea, had ample room for developing the female aspect of the high deity to its maximum extent.

2. The Identity of the Third Member of the Triad

While this might account for the development of the Father and Mother portion of the divine triad, the identity of the Child is a more complex problem. Given the tripartite Sethian history of salvation, the Child would be involved in the third and finally decisive salvific manifestation of the divine into the world. He could be the third manifestation of the Illuminator as in the *Apocalypse of Adam*. Or, under Christian influence, he could be seen as the one who (as the Logos in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*) rescues or who (as Seth in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*) puts on Jesus, or he could be viewed as the Christ who in the *Apocryphon of John* has appeared to John the Son of Zebedee after the resurrection. Or he could be simply conceived as the third and finally effective saving manifestation of the—feminine!—divine Pronoia in a scheme such as occurs in the Pronoia aretalogy at the end of the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (which the frame story transforms into Christ, its masculine narrator).

In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the incorruptible Child, called "the Triple Male Child" (III 49,26; 59,19-21), is Telma(cha)êl Telma(cha)êl Hêli Hêli Machar Machar Seth (III 62,2-4; 65,9; IV 73,13-14; 77,2-4). He occupies the third position in the primal Father, Mother, Child triad, and is identified as the Great Christ. But because of his identification with Christ, there are now two "Seth" figures, the Triple Male Child and the lower figure of the "great Seth," son of the incorruptible Adamas; thus the great Seth offers praise to the higher figure of Telma(cha)êl Telma(cha)êl Hêli Hêli Machar Machar Seth, his consort Youel, and their son Esephech, Child of the Child (III 61,23-62,11). A similar elevation of the child figure appears in *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, where the Triple Male Child is usually placed together with Protophanes, just above the level of Autogenes, who in the *Three Steles of Seth* is identified with the heavenly Pigeradamas, father of the heavenly Seth. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* includes yet another child figure, Esephech, the Child of the Child, perhaps the earthly son of the heavenly Seth. On the other hand, in the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 120,29) and the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II 5,8 and BG 27,21), the thrice-male epithet is applied, not to any "child" figure, but to Barbelo; so also the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 37,26) credits Protennoia/Barbelo with "three masculinities."[24]

Among these testimonia, the earlier Sethian treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (and at a later period, the *Three Steles of Seth*) link the Triple Male exclusively with Barbelo, whose child is the Autogenes Son and is identified with Barbelo's goodness or Christhood (MNTXPHCTOC). On the other hand, in Irenaeus' presumably early Barbeloite account, the Child of Barbelo and the supreme Father is Christ, while the actual Autogenes emerges afterwards at a distinctly lower level. Similarly in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the offspring of Barbelo is the Triple Male "Child," who is directly identified as Christ, while the figure of the Autogenes Son is demoted to the level of the divine Adamas; at a still later time, the Platonizing Sethian treatises place the Autogenes in the third and lowest level of the Barbelo Aeon. The fact that Irenaeus' source and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* identifies the Child as Christ suggests that Christian interpretation of the supreme Sethian triad was a factor in this demotion.[25] Christianization has caused the third member of the supreme

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24. The first of the three steles is devoted, not solely to Autogenes, but to Pigeradamas (VII 118,25-119,15), Autogenes (VII 119,15-120,17), *and* to Barbelo as Triple Male (VII 120,17-121,16; cf. B. LAYTON, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987], 152-153), while the second stele is devoted to Barbelo alone and the third to the supreme pre-existent living Spirit.

25. Considerable confusion arises here owing to Irenaeus' Barbeloite account, which imposes a distinction between Christ and the Autogenes Son, who according to the *Apocryphon of John* are one and the same. It appears that the process of Christianization has gone further in Irenaeus' source, which considers Barbelo's Son to be Christ and the Autogenes to be a lower figure generated by Barbelo's Ennoia and her Son's Logos. This account has converted Barbelo's cognomen Ennoia (or Protennoia) into one of her projected attributes, thus increasing their number from three to four, and converted the goodness (χρηστός) with which the Father anointed (cf. χριστός) her Son into the actual name of Barbelo's Son (Christ, not Autogenes), with the result that Autogenes becomes the lower offspring of Barbelo's Ennoia and Christ's Logos, clearly subordinated to Christ as actual Son of Barbelo. A similar demotion of the Autogenes occurs in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, where the initial offspring of Barbelo is called the Triple Male Child (alias the Great Christ), who couples with Youel to produce Esephech, Child of the Child; immediately thereafter, the Invisible Spirit and "Pronoia" are suddenly reinvoked as the parents of the "Autogenes Logos," who in turn couples with Mirothoe to produce Adamas. R. VAN DEN BROEK, "Autogenes and Adamas: The Mythological Structure of the Apocryphon of John," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers read at the Eighth International*

divine triad to be designated as Christ rather than Autogenes, who is demoted to a lower level, even though he still tends to be regarded as the father of the divine Adamas.

Perhaps one may postulate that the theogony underlying both the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus once envisioned a supreme deity Man, whose offspring, the Son of Man, was regarded as self-begotten (αὐτογενής) from an unnamed source that later became identified as the Father's first Thought (ἔννοια, feminine), in effect giving rise to the divine Father, Mother, Son triad. Beginning with the Platonizing Sethian treatises, the Father-Mother-Child nomenclature for the supreme triad disappears from the Sethian theology altogether. All of this suggests that Sethian speculation on the precise membership of the divine triad remained rather fluid, perhaps owing to the rather complex and esoteric exegesis of the Jewish and Platonic traditions upon which it was based, and the problem of finding a suitable location for Christ in the resulting theogonies. Indeed, the gender imagery of the principal Sethian transcendental figures is shot through with ambiguity, not a little of which owes to the difficulty of tracing the antecedents of gendered pronouns in the Sethian Coptic texts themselves.

C. The Development of the Sethian Literary Corpus

1. Pre-Sethian Sources

It has been suggested that the earliest examples of a developed transcendental wisdom theology that might serve as a basis for the theology and cosmology of the Sethian treatises seem to be the Pronoia monologue concluding the longer versions of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 30,11-31,25), the Barbeloite theogony of Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* I.29) and the non-Christian, non-Barbeloite and conceivably pre-Sethian theogony of *Eugnostos the Blessed*. These accounts display no

Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 3rd-8th, 1979), ed. M. Krause (Nag Hammadi Studies 17; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 16-25, notes that Irenaeus' (*Adv. Haer.* I.29) Barbeloite cosmogony, while designating Christ as the Son of Barbelo and placing the Autogenes at a level below him, nevertheless attributes a degree of praise and honor to the Autogenes that is unusual for an aeon produced after the completion of the Four Luminaries, but entirely appropriate for a member of the primal triad (the language derives from an interpretation of Psalm 8, according to which God has glorified the Son of Man by making him little less than himself [God] and giving him dominion over all things).

detailed interest in baptism or the primeval history of the Sethite generations, but focus on transcendental personifications of the divine wisdom occupying various ontological levels, such as Barbelo and her lower doubles, reminiscent of the numerous Sophia figures of *Eugnostos the Blessed*.

Of these, the Pronoia monologue portrays a series of three descents of the divine Pronoia for the illumination of those trapped in the world of darkness below, culminating in the conferral of the Five Seals on her final descent. The Irenaeus account relates the origin and deployment of the primal triad of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, the Autogenes Son, and the Four Luminaries, in the lowest of which dwells Sophia; it is Christianized by the identification of the Child figure of the divine triad with Christ, whose only function is to inaugurate the possibility of the enlightenment and subsequent generation of all things; in addition it concludes with a lengthy account of Sophia's generation of the creator Archon. *Eugnostos the Blessed* has no such features, but is subsequently Christianized by its incorporation into the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, which adds the story of Sophia's role in the creation of the lower world, Yaldabaoth's stealing of her power, and the production of the psychic Adam and his progeny from a drop of the pleromatic light. Like the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* also introduces the figure of the risen Jesus as narrator of the entire theogony, cosmogony and anthropogony, and as the savior of those caught in the lower world.

A similar theogony is offered by the *Apocryphon of John*, which is almost a duplicate of that in the Irenaeus account, but continues with an extensive anthropogony which draws upon the Sethite primordial history from Genesis 1-9. But the *Apocryphon* also incorporates the Pronoia monologue that concludes with the bestowal of the Five Seals, a monologue that probably underlies and forms the basis of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, itself devoid of interest in the interpretation of Genesis 1-9, but which contains a brief version of the theogony shared between Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29 and the *Apocryphon of John*, and which is heavily steeped in baptismal motifs. As in the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* ascribes the origin of the baptism of the Five Seals to the third descent of Pronoia or Protennoia, but unlike the *Apocryphon of John* and its Pronoia monologue, it clearly presents baptism as involving some kind of celestial ascent.

A possible way of sorting out these interrelationships would be to suppose the chronological primacy of those texts which seem to be sources of other texts in this group. Two obvious candidates would be the non- or pre-Christian theogonies of *Eugnostos the Blessed* and the Pronoia monologue. One might add to this Irenaeus' Barbeloite theogony and his Ophite myth, although these may derive from yet earlier sources they shared in common with the various versions of the *Apocryphon of John*. The Pronoia monologue or its equivalent, focusing upon Pronoia's three descents culminating in the conferral of the Five Seals, was incorporated into the Christianized treatises *Apocryphon of John* and *Trimorphic Protennoia*. *Eugnostos the Blessed*, focusing upon a primal pentad of masculine divine beings and various manifestations of the divine wisdom associated with them, was incorporated into the (non-Sethian) *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and the negative theology of its initial theogony may have inspired the somewhat similar negative theology in the *Apocryphon of John* (drawn from a source also used by the author of *Allogenes*). Its notion of the Autopator emerging from the self-reflection of Propator perhaps formed a model for the derivation of Barbēlo from the Invisible Spirit's self-reflection, and possibly its conception of the relations between Immortal Man, Son of Man, and Son of the Son of Man formed a model, not only for the supreme triad, but also for the relationship between Autogenes, Pigeradamas, and Seth.

2. The First Pre-Sethian Texts of the Descent Pattern

On this construction, the first Sethian text would have the Pronoia monologue of the *Apocryphon of John* or something very much like it. It is to be noted that it contains nothing distinctly "Christian" or "Sethian," since neither Christ nor Seth play any explicit role in it; the saving Gnosis and the baptism are directly conferred by an exalted wisdom figure, the divine Providence or First Thought of the supreme deity. This figure is regarded as the divine source of every spiritual entity, and she sustains an intimate, if not consubstantial, connection with her noetic or psychic offspring residing on the earth below. Since the monologue speaks of Pronoia's raising or awakening her offspring by "sealing him in the light of the water with Five Seals," one may assume that it may have been at home in a baptismal rite that conferred a guarantee of immortality through enlightenment. Whatever the details of such a rite, its inauguration was apparently associated with the third—and final—of Pronoia's

three earthly descents, thus inviting the creative elaboration of the circumstances of her first two descents.

Since later texts elaborate these descents on the basis of the Genesis protology, one suspects that certain midrashic interpretations of Genesis also played a role in this rite. Such a candidate might be something like Irenaeus "Sethian-Ophite" myth, in which events in primordial times were regarded as being driven by an all-provident Wisdom struggling against the powers of darkness that blinded the ability to recognize the enlightenment she came to confer on humanity. Since the Genesis account narrates specific acts of catastrophic destruction such as the flood and the conflagration, these too might be regarded as occasions for salvific descents of a savior such as those of the Illuminator in the *Apocalypse of Adam*; at some point, this savior would have been identified with figures other than Pronoia or Wisdom, such as that of Seth, or under Christian influence, that of Jesus as Wisdom's child.

3. The Christian Sethian Texts of the Descent Pattern

The second stage of literary development would be marked by the creation of distinctively Sethian texts, perhaps beginning with an early version of the theogony and protological myth found in the *Apocryphon of John*, and an elaborated form of the Pronoia monologue represented by the first compositional stage of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Such texts would have drawn upon theogonic materials like those of *Eugnostos the Blessed* with its negative theology and doctrine of multiple Sophia figures, and on the anthropological and soteriological conceptions like those of Irenaeus' Ophite source, but now structured in terms of the Sethian Father-Mother-Child triad, the doctrine of the Four Luminaries, the tripartitioning of history into four ages, and an emphasis on the uniqueness of Seth and his "unshakable race." So also a cosmogonic myth similar to the conclusion of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*—which assigns the origin of the cosmos and its creator to a mistaken act of Sophia—would have been taken up into the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. Along with the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* more fully elaborates the distinction between the salvific descents of the higher wisdom figure of Barbelo/Pronoia/Incorruptibility and the mistaken creative descent of Sophia as a lower wisdom figure, a distinction that serves as a crucial key to unlock the meaning of the primordial history of Genesis 1-9 and

the true roles played by such figures as Adam, Eve, Seth, and Norea (whose entreaty for salvation was also commemorated in the short treatise *Thought of Norea*).

Another major feature of this secondary level of literary development is the extensive adoption of Christological and other Christian motifs, no doubt due to an actual rapprochement between Sethians and various late first and early second century Christian groups. In the case of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, such Christianization is hardly visible if it is present at all,[26] but is dominant in the elaborate theogony and baptismal liturgical materials of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and its even more dominantly Christian contemporary *Melchizedek*.

4. The Shift from the Sethian-Christian Descent Pattern to the Platonic Ascent Pattern

At a tertiary stage of literary development, these themes—the theogony, the baptismal rite, and the primordial history—become liturgically elaborated in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, a liturgy that *Zostrianos* soon completely transformed into a practice of visionary ascent by transposing its earthly setting to a heavenly setting and abandoning all interest in the primordial history. Here, the lone earthly figure of Zostrianos now ascends to take part in a heavenly liturgy of vision and praise that the earlier Sethian treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John* had depicted as celebrated only by transcendent beings such as the aeons and other divine powers. The *Three Steles of Seth* advances upon this feature of *Zostrianos* by opening the field of participants in this liturgy to an entire group, for whose use it provides exemplary doxologies spoken by Seth himself.

All four Platonizing Sethian treatises have abandoned the Christological pretensions of their predecessors and—except for *Zostrianos*—no longer show any interest in the "fall" of Sophia, the origin and nature of the world creator, and the history of the Mother's successive salvific descents and the final overthrow of the hostile cosmic powers. The earthly cosmos and its delights still need to be overcome, but it is no longer characterized as a hopeless chaos created and dominated by an

26. See G. M. SHELLRUDE, "The Apocalypse of Adam: Evidence of a Christian Gnostic Provenance," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers read at the Seventh International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 8th-13th 1975)*, ed. M. (Nag Hammadi Studies 8; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), 82-91.

antidivine power; in fact *Marsanes* takes on a new interest in astral phenomena and post-Porphyrian theurgical speculation, and goes so far as to say that the cosmos is worthy of being preserved entire (X 5,17-6,1).

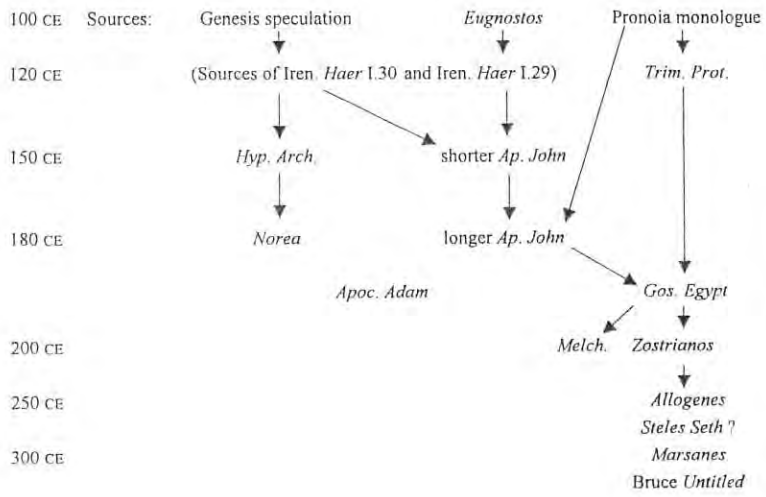
Of course, the most significant innovation of the Platonizing Sethian treatises is the importation of an entirely new and characteristically Middle Platonic metaphysics as the basis for Sethian theology. The Genesis and other biblical accounts are abandoned in favor of the physical and theological doctrine of Plato's dialogues (e.g., *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Parmenides*) or contemporary digests of their doctrine. The earlier notion of the divine Father-Mother-Child triad is completely transformed into an emanative metaphysics centered on the emanation of the Barbelo Aeon from the solely existing Unknowable One or Invisible Spirit by a stage-by-stage downward deployment of his Triple Power, which forms the chain of being to which the cognitive powers of the ascending visionary become assimilated as one contemplatively retraces this emanative path in the reverse direction.

The shift from the secondary, mainly Christian, stage of Sethian literature to the tertiary, mainly Platonic, stage may have been a matter of necessity rather than preference. The initial Sethian rapprochement with Christian concepts and ritual, alternating between the positive in the case of the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and *Melchizedek*, and the polemical in the case of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Apocalypse of Adam*, may have proved a liability. Christological concepts could clearly be used to depict the eschatological advent of the savior in their own era, but to adopt these meant also to reinterpret them in a Sethian way and thus challenge more "orthodox" Christological interpretations. Although the Sethians' somewhat unique Christology preserved for a time their separate conscious identity as an elect body, in the long run it must have earned the hostility of the increasingly better organized institutional "orthodox" Church. Certainly influential church fathers holding powerful ecclesiastical positions singled out the Sethians along with many others for attack. This may have led certain Sethians to make common cause with the devotees of an alternative prestigious religio-philosophical movement, the Platonists. Unfortunately, while initially welcomed in pagan Platonic circles, their insistence on enumerating and praising the divine beings with their traditional hymns, glossolalia, and other forms of ecstatic incantation irritated the more sober Platonists such as Plotinus,

Porphyry and Amelius. Although the Platonists initially regarded the Sethians as friends, soon they too, like the heresiologists of the Church, began writing pointed and lengthy attacks upon them for distorting the teaching of Plato which they adapted to depict their own spiritual world and the path towards assimilation with it.

D. A Hypothetical Literary Stemma of the Sethian Treatises

In accord with this developmental scenario, one may suggest a stemma of dependencies (indicated by arrows) among the Sethian treatises. The dates provided are only approximate; since nearly every treatise has its own peculiar history of redactions, one cannot assume a simple unilinear dependence of one upon another, but rather a more complex process of cross-fertilization. The graphic representation of the stemma omits representation of specific Middle Platonic sources; Platonic influence is demonstrably present in nearly every treatise, but only becomes dominant and transformative in the cases of *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*, and will be treated more specifically in the third part of this book. A hypothetical stemma would be as follows:



CHAPTER SIX

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF SETHIAN DOCTRINE

It seems that most of the Sethian literature discussed so far originated in the period 100-300 CE. The doctrinal content of this literature is built up from five basic complexes of traditional materials: 1) a fund of Hellenistic-Jewish speculation on the figure of Sophia, the divine wisdom; 2) midrashic interpretation of the first nine or so chapters of Genesis, along with other assorted traditions from Jewish scripture and exegesis; 3) a doctrine and practice of baptism; 4) the developing Christology of the early Church; and 5) a religiously-oriented Neopythagorean and Middle-Platonic tradition of metaphysical and epistemological speculation.

I. Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom Speculation

As appropriated from Jewish tradition by Sethian and other gnostic authors, Sophia is a hypostatized and personified form of Hokhmah, the divine Wisdom of Jewish wisdom literature. In such texts as Proverbs 8, Job 28, Sirach 24, and Wisdom of Solomon 7, Sophia is regarded as a preexistent divine power, the feminine image, reflection, emanation and breath of the high deity, his instrument in the creation of the world. She is a source of life and light, which she pours forth upon those who seek her. Although a heavenly figure who pervades all things, as God's own breath she covers the primeval earth—like the Spirit of Gen 1:2-3—like a mist, descending from her celestial dwelling to bring wisdom and divine revelation to humankind. Among these she seeks a dwelling, on some accounts successfully finding a permanent (as Torah and temple in Sirach 24) or temporary (as does the Logos of John 1) earthly dwelling, although without success among others (1 Enoch 42), resulting in her return to her celestial home and the descent of iniquity—perhaps in the form of the angelic watchers of Gen 6:1-4—to take her place.

> Proverbs **8** [22] "The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. [23] Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. [24] When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. [25] Before the mountains had been

shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth; [26] before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. [27] When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, [28] when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, [29] when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, [30] then I was beside him, like a master workman; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, [31] rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the sons of men. [32] And now, my sons, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. [33] Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. [34] Happy is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. [35] For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD; [36] but he who misses me injures himself; all who hate me love death." (RSV)

Wisdom 7 [22] "For in her there is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, [23] beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. [24] For wisdom is more mobile than any motion; because of her pureness she pervades and penetrates all things. [25] For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. [26] For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. [27] Though she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets." (RSV)

Sirach **24** [1] "Wisdom will praise herself, and will glory in the midst of her people. [2] In the assembly of the Most High she will open her mouth, and in the presence of his host she will glory: [3] 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. [4] I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud. [5] Alone I have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss. [6] In the waves of the sea, in the whole earth, and in every people and nation I have gotten a possession. [7] Among all these I sought a resting place; I sought in whose territory I might lodge. [8] Then the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, 'Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.' [9] From eternity, in the beginning, he created me, and for eternity I shall not cease to exist. In the holy tabernacle I ministered before him, and so I was established in Zion.'" (RSV)

1 Enoch **42** [1] "Wisdom found no place where she might dwell; Then a dwelling-place was assigned her in the heavens. [2] Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men, And found no dwelling-

place: Wisdom returned to her place, And took her seat among the angels. [3] And unrighteousness went forth from her chambers: Whom she sought not she found, And dwelt with them, As rain in a desert and dew on a thirsty land." (trans. Charles)

Wisdom's "*Fall*" and Restoration

According to these Jewish sources, wisdom is an entirely positive figure, the faithful instrument by which God creates and makes himself present to an ordered cosmos. Unfortunately, there is a hidden ambiguity in these Jewish traditions, since wisdom can be understood as both good and bad; she brings enlightenment, but she is also responsible for the creation of the material world whose luxury and delights are obstacles to enlightenment. If one conceives the world as an evil and seductive trap, then the wisdom that informs it is bad; but as the revealer of a higher existence, she is good. Therefore it is logical to suppose two kinds of wisdom, a higher enlightening manifestation of wisdom such as is represented in the figure of Barbelo and who is in some sense the Mother of the Living, and a lower, fallen form of wisdom, such as the agitated figure of the spirit moving over the primeval chaotic waters, perhaps even identical with the chaotic Tehom itself (Gen 1:2; cf. Marduk and Tiamat, and Sirach 24's characterization of Sophia as a sea).

The soteriological myths of the major Sethian "descent pattern" treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons* seem to have had their roots in a form of heterodox Jewish speculation on the figure of Sophia, the divine wisdom of the Hebrew Bible. In the hands of Sethian Gnostics, the biblical functions of Sophia as creator, nourisher, and enlightener of the world were distributed among a hierarchy of feminine principles: a divine Mother called Barbelo, the First Thought of the supreme deity, the Invisible Spirit; and a lower Sophia responsible for both the creation of the physical world and the incarnation of portions of the supreme Mother's divine essence into human bodies. Salvation was achieved by the Mother's reintegration of her own dissipated essence into its original unity.

The only difference between the world as it is now is and what it was originally intended to be is to be attributed to humans who fail to obey the precepts of that ultimate power. In the Sethian estimation, the hiatus between the present and intended condition of the world is attributed to a creator who fails to create the world according to the original intention

of the ultimate power behind it; paradoxically, humans, though not responsible for the origin of this hiatus, are the key to its undoing and the restoration of harmony between the original intention for the world and its present condition. This hiatus between primordial intention and present condition is valorized as a difference between what ultimately and really ought to be and a deficiency that is presently the case, a difference that can be conceived either temporally as a before and after, or as a once, now, and ultimately, or in terms of degrees of reality as prototype or archetype versus type, copy or resemblance; or ideal, complete, and perfect versus ordinary, imperfect, deficient, and fabricated. Such temporal differences are articulated in mythical narrative, while differences in degree of reality are expressed by ontological hierarchies or a "chain of being." In either case, the difference is due to some fault that intervenes in the course of the narrative or intrudes at some echelon in the chain of being.

In the Jewish myth of Sophia, the single figure of Sophia can be responsible for creation, sustenance and enlightenment of the world because she perfectly executes the intended design of the ultimate power behind that world. But once that execution becomes perceived as faulty, restoration of the intended design demands an act or process of rectification, and it is difficult to see how a single figure could simultaneously be cause of both creative deficiency and of sustenance and enlightenment. Thus the figure of Sophia is differentiated into phases representing her original status, her fall into deficiency, her restoration to her original status, and her restoration of the result of her deficiency. The narrative expression of this differentiation requires a temporal sequence of episodes: Sophia's fall into deficiency, her own restoration to completeness through repentance, and the restoration of the product of her deficiency through nourishment and enlightenment. On the other hand, the ontological expression of this differentiation usually requires that she be split up into at least two figures, a "lower" Sophia responsible for deficiency, and a "higher" Sophia responsible for enlightenment and restoration. The Sethian treatises generally combine both the temporal and ontological expressions of this differentiation. On a lower level, Sophia becomes the cause of cosmogonic deficiency, which is narrated as her "fall," while on a higher, transcendent level, she is by replaced the figure of Pronoia/ Protennoia/Barbelo who is able to restore the deficiency through her avatars on the earthly plane, such as Epinoia/Eve/Zôê, or

through distinct manifestations, usually three in number, portrayed as temporally successive descents (the Pronoia monologue) or modal manifestations of a single figure (the Trimorphic Protennoia's modalities of Voice, Speech, and Logos). Sometimes her final manifestation occurs as a masculine figure, such as Christ or Seth. Sometimes, as in the *Apocalypse of Adam* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the scheme of Barbelo's triple manifestation is mapped upon certain catastrophic events of world history, such as the flood, the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the subsequent domination of the world by hostile powers; in these cases, her three descents are represented as appearances of Seth or of an unidentified but Seth-like Illuminator. And in a similar fashion, the figure of the lower Sophia also becomes involved in the restorative process, sometimes as an avatar or envoy of the higher Mother figure (the *Apocryphon of John*), or sometimes in the person of her own Repentance (the *Gospel of the Egyptians*).

In Gnostic sources, the older tradition of Sophia's demiurgical role in the creation of the world often becomes regarded as her culpable fall from heaven which resulted in the creation of the physical world, even to the extent that she gives birth to the hostile and ignorant creator and Archon of this world who steals her creative power to create earthly copies of the transcendent beings. According to George MacRae, this radical innovation in the story of Sophia was brought about by reading it in the light of the Genesis 3 account of the seduction and fall of Eve that resulted from her and Adam's desire to be like God.[1] In a sense, the sin of both Eve in the Genesis story and of Sophia in the Sethian treatises is the same: a mistaken exercise of the power of choice.[2] Each attempted to exercise a divine capability for themselves, alone and unaided, and

1. See G. W. MACRAE, "The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1970), 86-101.

2. However, what many took to be the "fall" of Eve was often regarded by the Gnostics as a positive act (cf. *Hyp. Arch.* II 88,9-10; *Orig. World* II 113,5-10), since Eve could be seen not only as the source of the fallen race of Cain fathered upon her by the Archon, but also as the Mother of the Living who bore Seth, the progenitor of the enlightened race of Gnostics. The paradoxical nature of Eve was resolved by the postulation of a double Eve, the Eve-Zôê who enlightened Adam and bore him Seth, and her material representation as a body emptied of spirit and ravished by the Archon to produce Cain. STROUMSA, *Another Seed*, 35-70, brilliantly traces out the Gnostic theme of the ambiguity of Eve, Norea, Barbelo and Sophia in the context of Jewish exegesis of the myth of the seduction of mortal women by the fallen angels in Gen 6:1-4.

the result is evil. This amounts to being guilty of the sin of pride and passion, or, more crudely, of the sin of promiscuity, which in the Sethian estimation leaves the one alone in a state of deficiency and the other liable to rape by evil powers such as the Archon creator (or in other Jewish sources, by the devil or Azazel or Shemihazah). In either case, the result is a defective offspring who lacks the divine image.

The downward inclination or fall of Sophia in her cosmogonic role can be caused simply by gravity (as in the Ophite myth of Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30.3), or as an act initiated by a being other than herself (e.g., by Eleleth in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*). Her creative work can be viewed as a willful act undertaken without her consort or as a misconceived desire to honor the high deity by attempting to mimic his emanative power on a lower level. Unfortunately, her creative deed results in her emission of a downward tending abortive and shapeless likeness of herself, the Archon (as in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29 or the *Apocryphon of John*). Or perhaps her downward inclination results in the production of a veil which casts the shadow of darkness which becomes matter, which in turn becomes the form and substance of the Archon (as in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* or the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ*). Sometimes Sophia only illuminates a pre-existing darkness (the *Hypostasis of the Archons*), and sometimes she creates the darkness from which the Archon makes the world as a reflection of Sophia's reflection therein (as in *Zostrianos*; cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* II, 9, 10). Insofar as Sophia initiates her own descent, she is blameworthy, and is restored to the higher world only after her repentance (the *Apocryphon of John*). If her descent is caused by another being such as the Luminary Eleleth, she still requests her former place, although without repenting (the *Trimorphic Protennoia*; in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and perhaps in *Zostrianos* the tradition of her repentance survives, but is treated as a being called "Metanoia," regarded as distinct from Sophia).[3]

3. Certain of these notions may derive from an interpretation of Gen 1:2-3: by inversion, the deep (ἄβυσσος) on whose face there was darkness could be taken to refer to the transcendent realm in which the face of the high deity, conceived as Depth (cf. the Bythos of the Ophites and Valentinians), was obscured from those below by a subjacent shadow or veil (a sort of "darkness"); in this inverted scheme, the Spirit would be directly below the Depth (as in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.30.1).

On all accounts, however, Sophia is ultimately restored to her original place at the periphery of the divine world ("the Eighth"), at which point she acts to reverse her own declination by efforts to "make up" for the "deficiency" caused thereby. In the Sethian and Valentinian myths, Sophia seems to be the paradigm of human experience, responsible for our present plight by having fallen into matter and oblivion, but then, upon her repentance, acting in this world for our enlightenment. Thus the *Hypostasis of the Archons* manages to assign both negative and positive roles to Sophia: although the material realm originates, not from Sophia herself, but from the shadow cast by a veil, Sophia does give birth to the Archon, acting without her consort (as in the *Apocryphon of John*). But then she takes on a more positive role by parrying his arrogant boast in sole divinity with the introduction of light into matter, sending her daughter Zôê to cast him into Tartaros, and then exalting his repentant child Sabaoth above him. As a result, there is no need for her repentance, a theme that is prominent in the *Apocryphon of John*. In effect, the *Hypostasis* assigns Sophia's repentance to another figure entirely—the Archon's offspring Sabaoth—a strategy adopted also by the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, which assigns it to a distinct figure Metanoia, who restores the deficiency as the conduit for the emanation of Seth's seed (although ultimately it is not Sophia, but the higher figure of Barbelo who sends Seth as the explicit eschatological savior of humanity).

In the long run, a single figure could not simultaneously be cause of both deficiency and restoration. The vicissitudes in the career of Sophia as the symbolic paradigm of the human experience of falleness, awakening, and final salvific restoration, have become too ambiguous and ambivalent to continue to apply to a single figure. So the figure of Sophia is split up into several figures, each one of whom symbolizes only a single facet in her once multifarious but continuous career. The earliest versions of the Sethian, "Ophite," and Valentinian myths exhibit both the essential ambivalence of Sophia and the incipient tendency to split her into two figures, a higher Sophia who is a savior figure, and the lower Sophia (the Valentinian Achamoth and 'Ophite' Prunicos) who, if anything, becomes a "saved savior." In the Sethian texts, Sophia becomes the cause of cosmogonic deficiency, so she is replaced on the transcendent plane by the higher feminine figure of Pronoia/Barbelo, and on the earthly plane by Pronoia's avatars Epinoia, Zôê, the spiritual Eve, and

even the masculine Christ as the culminating Savior (rather as the Johannine prologue recasts a descending wisdom figure as Christ the Word). According to the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 25,2-16), it is the higher "Sophia figure" Pronoia/Barbelo who sends a copy of herself in the likeness of Sophia to prepare dwelling places for her seed and awaken it to the reality of the Pleroma in anticipation of her final descent to free it from all defect.[4]

While later redactions of the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* have eliminated most traces of Sophia's redemptive role by assigning it to the figures of Barbelo/Pronoia and Epinoia, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* has taken the further step of eliminating any explicitly salvific role for Sophia whatever in favor of that assigned to other figures, namely Metanoia, Hormos, Edokla, and Seth. But by the same token, Sophia is also relieved of ultimate responsibility for the origin of the lower archontic powers. According to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, Sophia commits no willful, blameworthy act of her own; rather, the "fall" of Sophia becomes the "fall" of the Epinoia of the fourth Luminary Eleleth; here it is Eleleth, the fourth Luminary itself who is ultimately blamed for the rise of Yaldabaoth and his work, while Sophia remains innocent (cf. the *Apocryphon of John* II 23,20-22) and is restored to her proper order without repentance (unlike the *Apocryphon of John* II 13,32-14,9), although her son has stolen her power.[5] Similarly, in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 56,22-61,1), Sophia has become the "hylic Sophia" cloud, responsible only for the production of the chaotic Matter that will be the substrate of the lower cosmos (as in *Zostrianos*, VIII 9,2-11,1). The ultimate responsibility for the production of the archons is assigned to the fourth Luminary Eleleth, whose ministerial agents Gamaliel and Gabriel succeed in generating Saklas and Nebruel from the hylic Sophia cloud.[6] Once these two generate subordinate rulers for the Zodiac and seven planetary spheres, Saklas boasts in his sole divinity, in response to which Barbelo's voice projects the divine image on which the archons model humankind. To correct the resultant "defi-

4. The most overt treatment of eschatology in the *Apocryphon* is the short dialogue on the destinies of various souls (BG 64,14-71,2; II 25,16-27,30). According to it, not all souls will be saved; it all depends on which spirit descends on the soul and unites with it, the Mother's "Spirit of life" or the counterfeit spirit, and on whether the soul accepts or rejects the saving knowledge. Those who turn away will suffer eternal punishment, implying that there will be no ultimate restoration of all things to their original state, or distinct grades of salvation for differing types of persons as in Valentinian doctrine. Salvation for those souls united with the Spirit seems to be undifferentiated and immediate upon death; they are raised by their "receivers" to eternal imperishable life, having been purified from evil "there" (BG 65,3-11; II 25,23-9), perhaps within aeons subjacent to the Four Luminaries functioning as a sort of purgatory. In the interim, as the Pronoia monologue puts it (II 31,16-25), one must protect oneself from the angels of poverty and demons of chaos and be sealed with the five seals to completely disarm the power of death. Moreover, those souls who have been dominated by the counterfeit spirit and remain in ignorance still have a chance for salvation via the process of reincarnation, during which other elect souls will enable them to reach knowledge, be initiated, and thus escape further reincarnations. The last category, souls who possessed the saving knowledge but then apostatized, enter into a poverty from which there is no repentance, to be kept for the day when all those who have blasphemed the Holy Spirit will suffer eternal punishment. On Sethian doctrines of the soul, see Chapter 14.

5. Perhaps the *Trimorphic Protennoia* either originates or else knows of a tradition which identified Sophia with the Epinoia of Light, perhaps a lower double of Barbelo, making her more a savior figure than a demiurgical figure (as in *Ap. John* II 20,9-28,5). In the *Apocryphon of John* (II 20,9-28,5) Barbelo, the merciful Mother-Father, sends down the Epinoia as a helper, called Life, to correct the deficiency of the *innocent* mother Sophia, also identified with Life. By appearing in the form of the spiritual Eve, the Epinoia also enlightens Adam through the Tree of knowledge, gives birth to Seth and his seed and elevates them to the Light. In this view, Eleleth, as the lowest level of the divine world of light, is both the origin and destination of its fallen and redeemed light which at various points in the mythic narrative is contained in Sophia, the Demiurge, Adam, Seth and his seed. Thus Eleleth is a "redeemed redeemer" saved by Barbelo, the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit.

6. Although the text is damaged, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* also seems to credit Eleleth with the "blood" drop containing the image of the heavenly Adam, a mytheme which may also be present in *Hypsiphrone* (NHC XI,4), where "Hypsiphrone" could be an alternate name for Eleleth. If the name Eleleth can be related to Aramaic אֵל־עֲלִיתָא, "God of the height," then Eleleth may be an old designation for one of the *egregoroi*, the angelic watchers of 2 Enoch 18, who are said to be of greater size than the giants produced by their intercourse with the daughters of men according to Gen 6:1-4. However, Eleleth's status as one of the four Sethian "Luminaries" (φωστῆρες) is so well-attested that one is hesitant to associate this being with intentionally evil deeds. In fact, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (II 92,18-93,1; implied also in *Norea*, IX 27,11-29,5) presents Eleleth as the savior of Norea, the untainted virgin daughter of Eve. Moreover, there is also the possibility that the four Sethian Luminaries derive ultimately from the archangels Raphael, Michael, Uriel and Gabriel, who according to 1 Enoch 9-10 descend to fight the fallen angels. On this, see G. A. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed*, 55 n. 77, who adduces this etymology in the context of a discussion of Eleleth's rescue of Norea in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. In the light of these possibilities, it is difficult to see just what point might be scored by implicating Eleleth in the birth of the ignorant creator of the world.

ciency," the supreme Father authorizes the appearance of Metanoia as a conduit through which Seth, with the help of Hormos and Edokla, sows his seed in Sodom near Gomorrah. Thereupon, Metanoia descends to the world to pray for the repentance of all humanity, not only the seed of Adam and Seth, but even for the seed of the archon that are destined to be destroyed by Seth upon his final salvific descent in the logos-begotten body of Jesus. Although the assignment of culpability to Eleleth rather than Sophia may be an isolated phenomenon in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, one may wonder whether it represents a point of debate in the Sethian evaluation of Sophia.

II. Interpretation of Genesis 1-9: The Sethite Sacred History

The notion of a double Sophia has far reaching implications, and leads almost intuitively to the notion of a layered model of the universe in which the upper layer serves as a model for a realm of copies in the lower layer. On a higher level, Sophia functions as a creator and savior figure, the divine Thought and self-reflection of the high deity, the Mother Barbelo who both originally projects and finally saves the image of true humanity for the benefit of earthly human beings. But she also functions on a lower level as Sophia, at first the mother of the ignorant creator, but upon her repentance who becomes "our sister Sophia," one of the instruments by which the higher Mother rescues the divine image captured by the creator in human form. N. A. Dahl stresses the role played by the thought of Philo in this complex of ideas, particularly the notion of Sophia as Mother of the Logos and as the Mother figure in a divine triad of God the Father, Sophia the Mother and Logos the Son (*Fuga* 108-109; *Ebr.* 30-33; *Leg. All*, 2.49):[7]

> Whereas the Philonic Logos was the agent of revelation and salvation as well as the agent of creation, the Gnostics made a separation between the agent of creation, the Archon, on the one hand, and the divine agent of revelation and redemption on the other. This duality of agents implied the assumption of two "Son" figures (the divine Logos and the ignorant demiurge or Archon) and necessitated a duplication of the Mother, e.g. a distinction between the female consort of the Supreme Being, mother of the Redeemer-Son, and the lower Sophia who produced the arrogant Archon ... in this connection Gen 1:26-27 served either as a point of departure or a point of contact, or most likely, as both. The passage not only provided a biblical warrant for a Platonic doctrine of models and copies, but suggested also that, like the first created man, even the higher "images" were "male and female," i.e. either androgynous or couples. Already Philo, *Fuga* 51, made the comment that Wisdom, the daughter of God, could be said to be a father, since her nature is male.

7. N. A. Dahl, "The Arrogant Archon and the Lewd Sophia: Jewish Traditions in Gnostic Revolt," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, Vol. 2: Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton (Studies in the History of Religions 41. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 689-712; the quotation is from 707-708 and 708 n. 44.

Of course, once this kind of Genesis interpretation begins, the actual situation rapidly becomes far more complicated. The mysterious plural in Gen 1:26 ("let us create Adam in our image, according to our likeness") could be construed to mean that: 1) on the transcendent plane, the high deity must be the absolute Human ("Man"), while his offspring, the heavenly Adamas or Pigeradamas, would be the Son of Man, and the plural "us" would imply the essential androgyny of the deity in whose image humanity was created as male and female;[8] and 2) on the earthly plane the plural "we" would refer to the plurality of the archontic fashioners of their "son," the material and psychic Adam of Gen 2:4 ff., unwittingly created according to the image of the supreme deity. Given the figures of Man and the Son of Man, one may then move to Gen 4:25 and 5:3, which signal the birth of a third figure, Seth, who, according to the latter passage, is begotten explicitly in Adam's—understood here as the divine Adamas—image and likeness, and therefore would be "the son of the Son of Man". Thus, as in the Ophite system of Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30.1,[9] *Eugnostos the Blessed* (III,*3* and V,*1*) and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (III,*4* and BG, *3*), there are three divine figures: a First Man (the high deity), a Son of the Man (the divine Adam as the authentic image of the high deity), and a Son of this Son of Man (Seth as the authentic image of Adam).

Thus the model/copy or image relation is worked out both vertically and horizontally: horizontally on both the heavenly and earthly planes in the sequence of offspring bearing a genealogical likeness to their parent, and vertically as a divine triad of Man (the supreme deity), Son of Man

8. The androgyny of these figures is stressed by the Naasenes (Hippolytus, *Ref.* V.6.3-11.1) and Monoïmus the Arabian (Hippolytus, *Ref.* VIII.12.1-15.2).

9. Complicated by the addition of the Spirit as the Mother of the Son of the Son of Man according to Gen 1:2-3.

(Adamas), and Son of the Son of Man (the heavenly Seth) whose image would be an earthly triad composed of the archon as the earthly "god," the earthly Adam who must be taught that his true father is the supreme deity, and the earthly Seth as the son of the enlightened Adam.

The *Apocryphon of John* locates such figures at three levels: the Invisible Spirit is the "First Man" (II 14,15-21), Adamas/Pigeradamas is the "perfect Man, the first revelation" (i.e., Protophanes, II 8,32-34), and the terrestrial Adam is the first earthly Man. Similarly, the Autogenes son of Barbelo is the First Son of man, the heavenly Seth the second Son of man, and Adam's son, the terrestrial Seth, is the earthly image of the Son of Man, the father of the human race (II 24,36-25,2). As Michael Waldstein observes:[10]

> The *Apocryphon* features three closely related father-son pairs: (1) the Invisible Spirit and his Self-generated son begotten in his "likeness" (III 9,13-14); (2) the heavenly Adam and his son, the heavenly Seth; and (3) the terrestrial Adam, created by Yaldabaoth "in imitation of the one who exists from the beginning, the perfect Man" (BG 49,4-6), and his son, the terrestrial Seth, begotten in Eve in "the likeness of the Son of Man" (II 24,3-25,1). In these three father-son pairs, the invisible Spirit is "the *first* Man" (AJ 37,19), Adamas is "the *perfect and true* Man" (AJ 21,17) who was "the first who came forth" (AJ 21,18), and the terrestrial Adam is the first *earthly* Man. These "men" have sons: the Self-Generated is the first Son of Man, the heavenly Seth the second Son of Man and the terrestrial Seth (AJ 65,20) the third and final Son of Man, forefather of the entire human race.

	Man	*Son of Man*
Primal Triad	the invisible Spirit the first Man	the Self-Generated, Christ the first Son of Man
The All	Adamas the first Man to come forth	the heavenly Seth the second Son of Man
The lower world	Adam the first earthly Man	the earthly Seth the third Son of Man

Of course, in addition to fathers, most sons have mothers, thereby suggesting the need to supplement these theogonical and earthly genealo-

10. "The Primal Triad in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature Commemoration*, ed. J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 44; Leiden, New York, & Köln: E. J. Brill, 1997), 176-177.

gies with suitable maternal figures. While the biblical account supplies the name of Eve as the mother of Seth, one must conjecture that the androgyny of Adam implies that the biblical God serves both as Adam's father and mother. Sethian theology then goes on beyond the Genesis account to delineate and name these as two distinguishable figures, the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo who in this role is often named Meirothea, mother of the divine Adamas. But then the maternal figure is divided into both a heavenly and earthly mother, Barbelo/Pronoia on high, and on a lower plane, Sophia, who mistakenly gives birth to the lower creator Yaldabaoth, who, being a product of parthenogenesis, has no father. While Barbelo in her capacity as Meirothea is mother of Adamas, in her capacity as Pronoia, the first thought of the supreme deity, she gives birth to a figure who is not derived from the Genesis account, namely the divine son of the Invisible Spirit Autogenes that Sethian tradition usually identifies with the NT figure of Christ. Finally, one can further discern two more mother figures, the spiritual Eve, Zôê or Epinoia, who is an earthly avatar of Barbelo, and the earthly Eve produced from Adam's side by the Archon. While the earthly Eve becomes mother of Cain and Abel as a result of her rape by the archons, the spiritual Eve becomes the mother (by the enlightened earthly Adam) of the earthly Seth. While biblical tradition supplies the figure of the spiritual Eve as mother of the earthly Seth, Sethian theology had to provide a suitable mother for the heavenly Seth, whose name, Prophania, only becomes explicit in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (and *Zostrianos*).[11]

Building on this plethora of father, mother and child relationships, the peculiar Sethian reinterpretation of Genesis 2-6 easily follows as a series of episodes concerning the origin, incarnation, subsequent history and salvation, portrayed as a sequence of moves and countermoves between the upper Mother and the lower Son (the Archon) in a contest over the control of the divine spirit in humankind, understood as the "seed of Seth" descended from Adam and Seth. This struggle constitutes the main episodes of Sethite sacred history: the making of the earthly Adam, his inbreathing with the divine Spirit, the sending of Eve or her extraction from Adam, the eating from the tree of knowledge, the expulsion

11. In the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 35,3-5; II 8,32-34) Adamas/Pigeradamas is said to be the "first appearing Man," that is *protophanes anthropos*, so it is appropriate that the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 51,4-22; cf. *Zostrianos* VIII 6,31-32; 51,11-12) name his consort, the mother of Seth and the Four Luminaries "Prophania."

from paradise, the birth of Cain, Abel, Norea, and Seth and his seed, the flood, the intercourse between women and the angels, perhaps some reference to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, and a final judgment and salvation.

In particular this involved a doctrine of heavenly dwellings (the Four Luminaries) for the prehistoric Sethite generations as the exalted counterparts of the contemporary "historical" Sethians, and a doctrine of the partitioning of history into three or four basic epochs of salvation. These epochs could be marked by events in the lower world, such as the flood, the conflagration and the final overthrow of the Archons (as in the *Apocalypse of Adam* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*). Or they could be delineated by the three descents from the upper world of a savior (usually the supreme Mother) involving 1) the inbreathing of the divine Spirit into Adam, 2) the arrival of the spiritual Eve (the luminous Epinoia, a Sophia figure) as a helper and enlightener for Adam, and 3) the final appearance of the Logos (according to the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* in the form of Seth or Christ). Other schemes or combinations of these episodes were also worked out. If there is anything peculiarly Sethian in the tractates under discussion, it would show itself here.

The background of this Sethian mythology is widely acknowledged to be Jewish. A recent and comprehensive attempt to demonstrate this has been offered by G. Stroumsa in his work *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*.[12] He points out that while Jewish monotheistic theologians occupied themselves with the question of the existence of evil in a good world created by a good God, Jewish Gnostic theologians sought an explanation for the existence of salvation in an evil world created by an evil god. At the root of both Jewish and Gnostic attempts to deal with this question in their separate ways were the two most prominent biblical myths that dealt with the origin of evil as a "fall" from an originally good state. These myths were 1) the story of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-4, and 2) the story of the fall of the angels from heaven and their subsequent intercourse with the daughters of men from Genesis 6. Within both Judaism and Gnosticism, the origin of evil was linked with sexual sins, which in turn were linked with the activity of Satan. While Judaism used the first myth to account for the rise of evil as an episode

12. G. A. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Nag Hammadi Studies 24; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1984).

within human history, Gnostic exegetes understood the fall as concomitant with the origin of creation itself by attributing the responsibility for Adam and Eve's sin to the creator himself as the initiator of Adam's desire to cohabit with Eve. While Jewish traditions could portray Cain as the son of the serpentine satanic seducer of Eve, Gnostic exegetes demonized the creator himself by identifying him as the one who seduced Eve to produce Cain and his descendants.

From this, Jewish Gnostics concluded that there were two races, the pure and undefiled seed of Seth, which avoids sexual intercourse, and the children of Cain, given over to lust, sin, evil and damnation. These two races must not intermingle. During the history of the world, the malicious creator Archon tries to oppress and destroy the seed of Seth by the flood, the conflagration of Sodom, and finally at the end of the world, but all three times Seth manages to save his righteous seed. The Gnostics knew themselves to be the "other seed," the progeny of Seth, who was born to Adam and Eve after she had successfully escaped the lustful attacks of the ignorant creator. By the use of the second myth, Satan's adulterous relations with Eve were highlighted by the Gnostics into a prime example of *mixis*, the illicit blending of two essentially separate kinds of beings through the union between mortal women and the angels descended from heaven, which resulted in the birth of giants and the sending of the flood. For the Gnostics, the leader of these angels was no longer Satan or other angelic figures as in Jewish tradition, but the creator himself, Yaldabaoth, Sakla or Samael.

Along with this second myth, there also developed the view among some first century Jews that, at the time of Jared and Enoch, most of the offspring of Seth, who had until then led a pure life, left their isolation and intermingled with the offspring of Cain. Noah alone preserved the purity of the seed of Seth at the time of the flood, and transmitted it to posterity through Shem. These Jewish thinkers may have identified these backsliding Sethites with the fallen angels of Gen 6:2, while identifying themselves with the pure Sethites, the Sons of God mentioned in Gen 6:4 (LXX). The Gnostics, who also considered themselves to be the pure offspring of Seth, knew the legends concerning the wicked Sethites of early times. Apparently in reaction to Jewish exegetical trends, some Gnostics, such as the author of the *Apocalypse of Adam*, inverted this element of Jewish salvation history by vilifying Noah and his posterity—including that of Shem—as the slaves of the evil creator, and exalt-

ing themselves as the intended but innocent and pure victims of the conflagration at Sodom.

As reinterpreters of Jewish tradition, both Gnostics and Christians might be considered as Jewish heretics. Both Christian and Gnostic authors tended to single out those Jewish values and exegetical traditions that seemed appropriate to support their own distinctive insights and claims. The Gnostic contribution in the exegesis of biblical myths was their attribution of the role of Satan to the creator god, thus producing an inversion of these myths as they are found in Jewish scriptural and haggadic sources. In the process, other inversions occasionally occur, such as the relative devaluation of Noah in favor of Seth. Both these primordial biblical heroes were credited with the survival of righteous humanity, Seth as the origin of the pure race of humankind after the murderous Cain, and Noah as the renewer of human history after the flood. Yet in some Sethian texts (e.g., the *Apocalypse of Adam*), Noah is regarded as the Sethite who served the hostile creator by prolonging the history of human obedience to his lustful ways, while Seth becomes the true savior of the righteous among his seed. Just as the Sethians tended to regard the biblical Adam as the earthly copy of his archetype the heavenly Adam, and hence to identify the heavenly Adam with the true image of the supreme God (according to Gen 1:26), so also they posited a celestial counterpart of the earthly Seth on the basis of Gen 5:3, where Adam's son is said to be born "according to his image, to his likeness." Seth was thus the savior of humankind, since he recovered the glory that belonged to Adam and Eve before their "fall" that had been engineered by the seductive and lustful Archon of creation. Seth would preserve this glory within his seed against the repeated attempts of the Archon to steal it, and would appear at the end of time to reinstate humankind to its original glory when the creator god and his followers would be overthrown.

Of all the biblical heroes, why would Sethian Gnostics settle on Seth as the symbol of their identity and lineage, their link to the past, their source of enlightenment and the ground of their hope? Why not Adam or Enoch, or Noah or Moses, all of whom captured the imagination of Jewish authors of the second temple period, and—unlike Seth—received extensive treatment in post-biblical didactic and revelatory literature? After all, Adam was the original parent of humankind, formed in the image of God. Enoch, placed in Eden (from which all humankind since

Adam and Eve were expelled, and which escaped the flood in order that he might testify against human wickedness), was reputed to be the first to learn writing, knowledge, and wisdom, and to record and systematize astronomy (*Jubilees* 4,16-25). The righteous Noah obediently preserved a remnant of the human stock from the same world catastrophe. Moses was the quintessential prophet, who led Israel from ancient servitude and mediated to her the wisdom of God's greatest gift, the Torah.

Yet, we find Sethian sources rejecting the Mosaic teaching ("Not as Moses said," *the Apocryphon of John* II 13,19-20; 22,22; 23,3; 26,6), and the name of Enoch is hardly mentioned in them (only in *Melchizedek* IX 12,8). On the other hand, the figure of Adam recurs repeatedly in Gnostic sources as the heavenly prototypical human being (Adamas) in whose image the earthly Adam is produced. While the heavenly Adam functions as a subordinate being in the protological stage of the great Gnostic cosmologies, where he does little else than request a son to be father of the incorruptible race, by contrast, the earthly Adam is the central focus of the Gnostic anthropogony. Yet he is portrayed as a haplessly automated lump of clay in the hands of a half-witted and jealous world creator who makes a mess out of his attempt to construct an earthly copy of the heavenly Adam. The earthly Adam's only distinction is that he responds to certain special saving initiatives from the divine world usually mediated to him by his enlightened wife Eve, in order that he and Eve might bring into the world the true father of the unshakeable race, Seth. Perhaps most significantly, while Seth is the father of a unique segment of righteous humanity, Adam could be viewed as the father of all humanity, but which would unfortunately include not only the righteous, but also the wicked.

One might hypothesize that in Sethian eyes, what distinguished most traditional biblical heroes from Seth was their apparent servitude to the creator God of traditional Judaism, whom many Sethians viewed as the bungling, if not malevolent, source of a defective human condition. Perhaps Sethian thinkers would have viewed figures like Enoch, whom Genesis regarded as building of a city (Gen 4:17) and walking closely with God (Gen 5:21-24; Sirach 44:16), and whom Jewish tradition also associated with the advent of the arts and sciences (e.g. the astronomical treatise of 1 Enoch 72-82), as encouraging the corrupt ease and luxury

of a lazy, indulgent, even wicked and materialistic, human race.[13] The fact that not Seth, but Enosh, Seth's son, was the first to call upon the name of Yahweh (Gen 4:26), implied that the same might be true also for the rest of Seth's antediluvian progeny; although they did not mix with the immoral race of Cain, their common invocation of the creator God, considered by Gnostics to be a being less than the supreme deity, would be a blemish on their claim to authentic divine sonship. Seth, however, stands as a solitary figure between, and untouched by, the murderous materialism of Cain and the homicidal giants (Gen 6:1-4) who became dominant at the time of the flood.

III. A Tradition of Baptism

It is clear that some form of baptismal ritual, usually called the Five Seals, was practiced by the Sethians.[14] The surviving evidence points to the Sethian baptismal rite as the context or occasion for many of the principal Sethian themes to coalesce into a distinctive religious movement with an established ritual of communal or individual enlightenment, whether enacted as a contemplative ascent or as a saving gift conferred by a descending redeemer. Despite the numerous references to ritual acts that could indeed be enacted by ordinary human beings, the importance of the rite lay primarily in the spiritual plane, an emphasis that seems characteristic of Christian and probably non-Christian baptizing circles throughout the first century. Indeed, this spiritual emphasis could even entail Sethian polemic against their own and others' baptismal use of ordinary water, as in the *Apocalypse of Adam*.

In particular, the Sethian baptismal water was understood to be of a celestial nature, a Living Water identical with light or enlightenment, and the rite itself became understood as an initiatory or even repeated

13. See the interpretation of Gen 6:1-4 in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 29,16-30,11).

14. The baptismal mythologumena are found in many of the Sethian treatises, especially in the hymnic materials of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 64,10-68,1), *Apocalypse of Adam* (V 76,26-85,31), *Melchizedek* (IX 5,17-6,10; 7,27-9,27; 16,11-18,7), the Pronoia monologue of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 30,11-31,25) and in the aretalogical and baptismal material of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. The spiritualized baptismal rite known as the Five Seals is reflected already in the first compositional stage of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 48,15-30) as well as in passages that seem to derive from the second compositional stage.

ritual of cultic ascent involving enlightenment and therefore salvation. The conception of baptism as a ritual act of salvation must have been current as early as the first century CE, to judge from the complex of ideas in Colossians 2:8-15, where circumcision, regarded as a stripping off of the body of flesh, is connected with a baptism conceived as a dying and rising, and Christ's death is interpreted as a disarming of the principalities and powers. Similar motifs appear in the Sethian treatises: a divestiture motif is found in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 48,6-14, stripping off the psychic and somatic garments of ignorance), and a disarming motif is found in *the Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 64,3-9).

In the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the baptismal rite of the Five Seals combines both the motifs of enlightenment by revelatory descent and by visionary ascent. A number of passages, mostly redactional in character,[15] suggest that the living water in which one is baptized derives directly from the Voice of Protennoia/Barbelo herself, flowing forth as radiant light.[16] Having imbued this living water with "Living Fruit," perhaps the primordial seed of Seth itself (cf. the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 56,4-22), Protennoia pours it out upon her "Spirit" which originated from the Living Water but is now trapped in the soul below in the form of her fallen earthly "members." In this way, she confers upon candidates for Sethian baptism the status of the primordial or archetypal offspring of Seth who reside above in the third Light Daveithai. The imagery is similar to that found in NT accounts of Jesus' baptism in which he sees the heavens open, receives the Spirit descending as a dove, and hears the revelation of the divine voice. On the other hand, in XIII 48,6-35, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* portrays this baptismal rite as a celestial ascent in which Protennoia's members are transformed, purified, and clothed with radiant light. The Five Seals are here interpreted as a five-stage ascent ritual: investiture of the stripped Spirit with light, enthronement, baptism by Micheus, Michar and Mnesinous in the spring of Living Water, glorification with the Fatherhood, and rapture into the light (perhaps the Four Luminaries) by the servants of the Lights Gamaliel and Samblo. The fact that the author refers to the recipients of this

15. XIII 36,5b-7a; 37,1b-3a; 37,35-36; 41,21b-24a; 42,23-24; 45,12b-20; 46,16-19a; 48,top-48,12a; probably 48,35-49,top and 49,26b-34a.

16. Cf. the radiant light with which the Invisible Spirit is surrounded in the *Apocryphon of John* II 4,18-26, as well as the important place given to the Four Luminaries.

baptismal ascent ritual in the first person plural and as "brethren" suggests a (Sethian) community with a well-established tradition of water baptism, spiritually conceived as a mystery of celestial ascent; it brings enlightening Gnosis (XIII 48, 33-34) and total salvation.[17]

The Sethian baptismal materials link the earthly descent of the savior (Pronoia/Protennoia, often in various guises such as the Logos, Seth or Christ) with the descent both of the soul into the body and of the baptizand into the water, and they also link the savior's return to the world of light with both the ascent of the soul from the world into the light and of the baptizand out of the water. This humiliation/exaltation pattern, basic to Pauline thought and to NT Christological hymns such as Phil 2:6-11 is found as far back as the royal enthronement rituals of Israel and generally throughout the ancient Near East.[18]

17. See H.-M. SCHENKE, "Gnostic Sethianism," 602-607, where Schenke distinguishes two Sethian rites or mysteries, baptism, and a higher one, cultic ascension. He calls attention to the interpretation of baptism as the stripping off of the flesh found already in Col 2:11-15, suggesting that earthly and celestial Sethian baptism are likewise cultically identical. Although I would agree that the baptismal rite was originally foreign to the Sethians and adopted by them in the course of their contact with other, possibly Christian, baptismal movements such as the group behind the Barbeloite theogonies, surely the baptismal rite was the cultic setting from which the apparently non-baptismal visionary ascension in texts such as *Allogenes* arose. In *Allogenes* and *Steles Seth* this ascension was developed apart from, or has become detached from, the older baptismal mystery, but in *Trim. Prot.* and *Zost.* it is still associated with the baptismal rite, or at least interpreted in terms of it. Schenke's observations lead him to suppose that the ultimate origin of gnostic Sethianism was in the baptist circles of Palestine, a supposition with which I entirely agree.

18. The motif of exaltation and enlightenment through some kind of water rite is at least as old as the ancient Mesopotamian enthronement rituals, in which the king, stripped of his regalia, symbolically undergoes a struggle with the dark waters of chaos, cries for aid, is raised up and nourished by water and food, absolved and strengthened by a divine oracle, enthroned, invested, and acclaimed as king, acquiring radiance and authority ("I will praise the Lord of Wisdom," tablets 3 & 4, *ANET* 434-436; cf. Psalms 18, 30, 69, 80, 89, & 146; 1 Kings 1:38-47). The Sethian rite of baptism called the Five Seals as described in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* consisted at least of enrobing, baptism in the Living Water, enthronement, glorification and enlightenment (transportation into the light; cf. XIII 48,15-35; 45,12-20), acts similar to those in 2 Enoch 22 (stripping earthly garments, anointing, enrobing, enlightening) and in the *Testament of Levi* 8,2-10 (enrobing as priest and king, anointing, washing, eating, drinking, further enrobing and crowning). In *Testament of Levi* 18,6-7, at the advent of the eschatological priest, a star arises, emitting the light of knowledge, the Father's Voice issues from the heavenly temple, and the spirit of understanding rests upon him in the water. Similar baptismal motifs occur

In a recent study of Sethian baptism,[19] J.-M. Sevrin hypothesizes that the original baptismal rite, adopted rather than instituted by the Sethians, was probably performed only once as an initiation. Its goal was fructification and quickening through "Living Water," rather than purification through lustration, even though it resulted in separation from the profane world. The receipt of "Living water," identified as life and light, was a metaphor for enlightenment by the receipt of the saving Gnosis that enabled the Sethians' insight into their celestial origins. Although the Sethian texts portray this rite as almost completely metamorphosed into a visionary and contemplative practice of spiritual ascent, it was traditionally associated with a ritual of water baptism in which there were cultic officiants, and in which the initiate was immersed perhaps five times, each in the name of various Sethian divine figures.

The Sethian texts, especially the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, contain many names for various "baptizers," "guardians," and "receivers," which were probably invoked during the actual baptism. In addition to a ritual invocation (ἐπίκλησις) and formal renunciation (ἀπόταξις, ἀποταγή) of fleshly associations, there may have been additional rituals of investiture and enthronement, perhaps also of anointing, as symbols of their status as the sovereign and autonomous, thus "kingless," race or generation of Seth.

Sevrin conjectures that such a baptismal rite was not original to Sethianism, since it is only the *Gospel of the Egyptians* that connects Seth firmly with the institution of the rite. The rite was instead originally at home in the movement which developed the mythology surrounding the figure of the Mother Barbelo, who flowed or emanated from the Living water which symbolized the self-reflection of the First member of the Father-Mother-Child triad; in many Sethian treatises it is she her-

in the *Odes of Solomon* (11,7-16: drinking Living Water, stripping away of folly, enrobing with radiance and enlightenment and 24,1-5: the Voice of the dove above the Messiah and the opening of the abysses). The sequence of acts described in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* is also nearly duplicated in the Mandaean *masbuta* as summarized by K. RUDOLPH, *Die Mandäer: II. Der Kult* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, N.F. 57; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), 88-89: entrance into the "jordan," triple self-immersion, triple immersion by the priest, triple signation with water, triple drink, crowning, invocation of divine names, ritual handshake, and ascent from the "jordan."

19. J.-M. SEVRIN, *Le dossier baptismal séthien: Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Études » 5;. Québec: Presses de l' Université Laval, 1986).

self or in one of her various modalities who actually confers the rite of the Five Seals. This mythology and the rite which it symbolized was only gradually connected with the Sethite sacred history that centered on the generations of Adamas, Seth, the seven primordial sons of Seth, and their subsequent postdiluvian progeny until the present. The present Sethian system results from designating the Barbeloite figure of the Autogenes Son as the one who established the Four Luminaries to serve as heavenly dwellings for all the seed of Seth, past and present, and from transferring the role of conferring the Five Seals from Barbelo to Seth or Seth in the guise of Christ.

The conclusion to be drawn from these clusters of ideas is that the soteriology involving the saving descent of the divine First Thought (Barbelo), or of her Voice or Word, was combined with the Sethite sacred history centered on the savior Seth in a baptismal environment characterized by speculation on the significance of words spoken and waters involved (cf. *Zostrianos* VIII 15,1-21) during the first half of the second century CE. In this environment, Sethians rubbed shoulders with Christians, coming in the process to identify their savior Seth or Barbelo with Christ or Jesus, even to the point of entering the Christian Christological debates, sometimes in a quite polemical fashion.

Baptism, Visionary Experience, and Priestly Lustrations

The close association of baptism with visionary experience in the Sethian treatises seems to have even more remote antecedents that lie, at least in part, within ancient and later Jewish priestly protocol.[20] On entering the Jerusalem temple, ritual purity was required of both priests and laity, and various forms of lustration or self-immersion were practiced by the priests prior to service in the temple so long as it was in existence. But during the periods of the temple's demise, from 586 BCE to its rebuilding in 515 BCE, and after its final destruction in 70 CE, as well as throughout the period of the widespread Hasidic rejection of the temple and its administration during the Hasmonean regime, visionaries and apocalyptic seers in the wake of Ezekiel developed the notion of a

20. This notion is worked out in more detail in my study of Sethian Baptism, "To See The Light: A Gnostic Appropriation Of Jewish Priestly Practice and Sapiential and Apocalyptic Visionary Lore," in *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy and Divination in Mediterranean Antiquity*, ed. R. M. Berchman (Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 163; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998), 63-113.

superior, supramundane temple. It was here that God had caused his glory to reside in preference to a corrupt or damaged earthly temple, and which could be approached only by an act of vision. By such acts of vision, transcendent and eschatological realities and events could be made a present reality. Yet if ritual cleansing and immersion was required for service at the Jerusalem temple when it existed, how much the more would such cleansing be required for service in the heavenly, eschatological temple that replaced the earthly temple during the periods of its destruction or corruption. If service in the earthly temple was not a live option, then one presumably could develop alternative means for participating in the liturgy of the heavenly temple. Thus one would expect lustrational practices to have continued to be the appropriate means of purifying oneself for attendance in the supramundane temple as well, except that in this case, they became a prelude to acts of vision, perhaps even the means through which visionary ascent was achieved, as well as a component of the vision itself.

Although the links are largely circumstantial in nature, it is tempting to seek the ultimate antecedents of the transcendental baptism of the Sethian Gnostics in the visionary experience of certain Jewish priestly groups that had become marginalized by the socio-political instability and factionalism that typified the final two centuries of the second temple period. Perhaps it is not going too far to suggest that ritual immersion in water was viewed as one means to strip away the perceived corruption of the world from the mind of one who would handle these sacred matters and have heavenly secrets revealed to him. Such wisdom was available only to the pure, whether it be revealed from above to below through meditation on the Torah, or whether it be sought by a visionary ascent of the soul to the heavenly temple and the divine throne. Either way involves an act of vision. To be washed in purifying water would be tantamount to being bathed in the divine spirit and wisdom, to being immersed in the intense light surrounding the divine throne. In God's house, next to the divine throne in the shadow of the cherubimic wings, one drinks from the divine river, the fountain of life, by whose light the visionary sees light (Ps 36:7-9).

Ordinarily, it was the priests who presided over the temple, the place where one would most expect to receive a vision of God, as did Isaiah in his inaugural call (Is 6:1-13), the place where wisdom had settled in her quest for a home, and ministered just as the priests (Sirach 24:8-12).

Those who would seek the face of God and behold his beauty serving in his house all the days of their lives must have clean hands and a pure heart (Pss 24; 27). Among those seeking such a vision, it would be priests above all who would have had a strong interest in lustration and in the degree of purity possessed by and enabled by various waters. The priesthood and their Levitical assistants who chanted hymns and gave instruction seem to be ideal candidates for the authorship of much of the speculative wisdom found in apocalyptic and other literature concerning various calendrical schemes, the structure of the upper world with its heavenly temple, and the creation of the universe (e.g., the Priestly account of the creation in Genesis 1). Immersion in study and speculation concerning such matters amounted to immersion in the divine wisdom, just as much as immersion in the study of the Torah.

Many of these instances of association between water and the visionary experience of prophets and seers—such as Ezekiel, Daniel, and the heroes of 1 Enoch and the Testament of Levi, as well as of the Qumran covenanters—are connected in one way or another with the Israelite priesthood, particularly in post-exilic situations where the normal discharge of this function was prevented by either the demise of or a perceived corruption of the earthly temple. In Ez 1:1-28, Ezekiel is sitting with the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens open, and he sees visions of God coming out of the North. In Daniel 10:4-9, Daniel is standing by the great river in Babylon and receives a vision of a celestial being, perhaps Gabriel, who is clothed in the same kind of linen garment as is the high priest on the day of atonement (Lev 16:4; cf. also the angels in Ezekiel's visions, Ez 9:3-11; 10:2). In 1 *Enoch* 13,7-9, Enoch sits beside the river Dan reading out the Watchers' petition for divine forgiveness, falls asleep, and receives a dream-vision of the divine, whereupon he ascends to heaven. The heaven through which he ascends to the divine throne is clearly a temple with vestibule, sanctuary and holy of holies, through which he passes as though he were an authorized high priest (cf. *Jubilees* 4:45); the angels for whom he intercedes seem to symbolize the Jerusalem priests as having polluted the temple through their sins. This way of criticizing the earthly temple and priesthood by comparison with the heavenly goes back to Ezekiel's vision of the departure and return of the divine glory in chs. 40-48. In 1 Enoch 24-26 there is a constellation of images including such things as: the tree of life planted in the holy place, the divine throne, and the temple and the

holy mountain from which the streams of life are to flow. In fact almost all the early Jewish ascent apocalypses[21] understand the celestial realm as a temple; the visionary achieves his place among the angels through investiture with a special garment and joining the angelic praise of the deity, just as priests and Levites respectively act in the earthly temple. In 2 Enoch 22, the archangel Michael strips Enoch of his earthly garments, anoints him with oil and invests him with glorious garments in the manner of a priest, and he becomes a glorious being. The connection between water and visionary experience is also evident in a Jewish midrash on the "Vision of Ezekiel":[22]

> Ezekiel stood beside the river Chebar gazing into the water and the seven heavens opened to him so that he saw the Glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, the living creatures (*hayyot*), the ministering angels, the angelic hosts, the seraphim, those of sparkling wings, all attached to the *merkavah*. They passed by in heaven while Ezekiel saw them (reflected) in the water. Hence the verse says: "by the river Chebar."

In the case of the priesthood, it seems possible to hypothesize a connection between the experience of vision and water, whether that water be a

21. Similitudes of Enoch, 2 Enoch, Apocalypse of Abraham, Ascension of Isaiah, Apocalypse of Zephaniah, 3 Baruch, the Testament of Levi, and the Temple Scroll (11QT 29).

22. Quoted from L. JACOBS, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977) 29; cf. *Bathê Midrashoth*, 2 vols., ed. S. A. Werthheimer (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2nd ed., 1954), 2.129. M. E. STONE (*Scriptures, Sects and Visions: A Profile of Judaism from Ezra to the Jewish Revolts* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], 85) wonders whether the connection between heavenly visions and bodies of water may be related to certain Graeco-Roman magico-meditative techniques involving contemplation of a body of water until visions were seen in it. Such examples of hydromancy go as far back as the ancient Sumerian list of antediluvian kings: the seventh, Enmeduranki, was honored by Shamash and Adad with the mystery of Anu, Enlil and Ea, namely, how to observe oil on water. One is reminded of catoptromantic or lecanomantic techniques in which watery surfaces and mirrors were used to attract and cause souls (usually of the dead) to appear. For instances, see Varro, *apud* Augustine, *De civ.* VII.35; Strabo, *Geographica* 16.2.39; Pausanius, *Graeciae descriptio* 7.21.12; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 37.192; Apuleius, *Apologia* 42-43; Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* II.10; III.11; Porphyry, *De antro, passim*; Damascius *apud* Photius, *Vita Isidori* cod. 242 191.1-4; 203.1-31; *PGM* IV 165; 225. In the *Poimandres*, the myth of Narcissus is used to articulate the process whereby a non-material entity is instantiated in the phenomenal world: the archetypal man is attracted to and unites with his reflection in the reflective surface of Nature. To be compared is the projection of the image of the archetypal man onto the primordial waters in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* or the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*.

feature of the heavenly temple or the ordinary water associated with purificatory lustrations. Such a connection would have been known to the authors of the wisdom books as well, especially if their places of instruction or the scriptoria within which they produced their books were part of the temple complex, and they were themselves priests or traced their ancestry through priestly or Levitical families.

One therefore is lead to imagine the closest relationship between the search for the divine wisdom portrayed in the Jewish wisdom books and the priestly experience of seeking and serving in the place of the divine presence, whether that be found in the mundane or the heavenly temple. The pursuit of the divine presence and wisdom on the part of sage and priest alike seems to have involved acts of transcendental vision. This form of spiritual quest seems common not only to priest and sage, but also to the apocalyptic seer as well as the gnostic visionary. Although the relationship of the authors of the wisdom books to the temple cult is not clearly delineated, at least some of them were likely priests or Levites who objected to perceived improprieties in the temple cult in Jerusalem during the second century BCE and the first centuries BCE and CE.[23] One thinks of certain priestly groups—such as those who took refuge in the Dead Sea community at Qumran—that were either excluded from the temple establishment or rejected what they perceived to be its pollution at the hands of those who owed their priesthood to the patronage of pagan Romans, or, after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, were left with no earthly temple at all. In the socio-political instability and factionalism marking the end of the second temple period, both wisdom and the priests whose sense of cultic legitimacy as those instructed in the true wisdom were felt to be displaced from social reality. Thus marginalized, such figures were idealized as the personified divine wisdom and ideal high priestly figures such as Levi and Melchizedek who, though absent from the actual temple cult, were nevertheless available to those who could envision the heavenly realm.

23. From ancient times there must have been scribal schools associated with the temple for the instruction of the Levites and priests who in turn instructed the people in the law on the great feast days. Josephus mentions "scribes of the temple" in reference to an edict of Antiochus III (*Ant.* I.12.142). II Chron 34:13 appears to depict the scribal office as a prerogative of the Levites, as also Sirach 45:17 seems to characterize the descendants of Aaron. By the time of Ben Sira (ca. 180 BCE; cf. Sirach 51:23,29) one sees references to the "Jewish house of learning" and the seat (*yeshiva*) of the teacher which were no longer directly associated with the temple. Many Essenes still held that teaching was a prerogative of the priests, especially the Zadokites (Josephus, *Bell. Jud.* 3.352; *Josephi vita* 8-9; cf. *T. Levi* 13,2-6), yet at Qumran it is clear that the receipt of wisdom is no longer specifically linked to the temple; it comes to those "who are far from its gates, who are driven from its entrances" (11QPs^{a} 154).

It is quite possible that a connection between lustration and visionary experience arose in the realm of the apocalyptic thought that developed throughout the first five centuries BCE and continued in the early Christian and associated movements such as that of John the Baptist and his followers, as well as the Sethian Gnostics. It is strikingly evident in the case of the traditions concerning the inaugural baptism of Jesus by John, as well as in the Sethian texts themselves. One may note that according to synoptic tradition, the seer-prophet John the Baptist, at whose hands Jesus was baptized—thereby receiving a vision of the open heavens and hearing the divine voice pronouncing him Son of God—was from a priestly family through his father Zechariah. It seems likely that certain priestly visionary practices were known to the authors of apocalyptic and sapiential literature insofar as they shared in what seems to have been a general affiliation between scribe and Levitical priest, or even to the extent that ordinary laity were expected to wash before entering the temple or handling the Torah. It is in this sacerdotal-sapiential-apocalyptic speculative environment that the Sethian visionary and baptismal traditions are likely to have arisen.

IV. The Christian Contribution

Throughout the second century, Sethianism was gradually Christianized, leading to an equation between Christ and various figures such as the Autogenes Son of Barbelo or as the final salvific manifestation of Barbelo or perhaps even as Seth. This process could move in two directions: in a positive direction by adding explanatory Christological glosses as in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, by casting Sethian materials into the framework of a revelation dialogue between Christ the revealer and a revered disciple as in the *Apocryphon of John*, or even by the mere appendage of Sethian doxological formulae to otherwise purely Christian homiletic material, as in *Melchizedek*; or in a more negative, polemical direction, as in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where there occur radical challenges to ordinary Christian views about the nature and work of Christ. So also the reverse movement might have occurred, in which

Sethian materials were built into originally non-Sethian Christian materials, as could be the case with *Melchizedek* (NHC IX,*1*).

The natural affinity between Sethians and Christians would have been their common proclamation of the historical appearance of a pre-existent revealer or redeemer believed to be the true image of God, respectively Seth or Jesus, and their common tendency to develop a highly selective interpretation of Jewish scripture. The historicization of the final descent of the Mother in the form of a quasi-human figure bearing a saving baptism suggests Christian influence as well. The identification of Christ with the Sethian figure of the Son, either Adamas or Autogenes as the Son of the God "Man" or his son Seth, would have been a natural one, and the resulting Son figure would have been associated with a revelatory descent and possibly the conferral of a saving baptism. Not only are such identifications present in the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and perhaps the *Apocalypse of Adam*, but they are made explicit by Epiphanius, fourth century bishop of Salamis:

> These Sethians proudly trace their ancestry to Seth the son of Adam, magnify him, and attribute to him whatever is virtuous—the signs of virtue and righteousness and anything else of the kind. What is more, they even call him Christ and maintain that he is Jesus. (*Panarion* 39.1.3, trans. Williams)

Moreover, Sethian baptismal mythologumena suggest that the baptismal rite must have been developed in some kind of rapprochement with Christianity; the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 66,8-68,1) and *Melchizedek* (IX 5,23-6,10; 16,11-18,7) contain liturgical prayers in the name of Jesus. Its developers must have sustained their initial encounter with Christianity as fellow practitioners of baptism, indeed a baptism interpreted in much the same symbolic and spiritual direction. For example, the Sethian name for the Living Water, itself a conception found also in Johannine Christianity (Jn 4:7-15), is Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus, which seems very much like a version of the name of Jesus into which Christians were baptized, perhaps in a threefold way. Yet to adopt this name did not necessarily mean understanding oneself principally as a Christian, as the rather cryptic and concealed form of this name suggests.[24]

24. Indeed it was adopted by the redactor of the apparently non-Christian the *Apocalypse of Adam*.

Such identifications of the Sethian savior with Christ would be bound to lead to further Sethian elaborations of Christ's exact role in their soteriological scheme that might be quite out of accord with more mainstream notions of Christ's salvific role. The introduction of Christological motifs for apparently polemical purposes in the third subtractate of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, suggests that the triple-descent motif may have been developed in connection with an attempt to distinguish Sethianism from Christianity, which stressed the once-for-all nature of Christ's redeeming activity. Early Christian literature exhibits several elementary tripartitionings of history, e.g., Luke's division of history according to the mode of the Spirit's activity in Israel, in Jesus, and in the Church. But for most Christian theologians, the period of Israel was not so much salvific *per se* as it was one of preparation for the advent of salvation in Christ (cf. e.g., 1 Pet 3:18-22), while for the Sethians, salvation had been in principle already achieved in primordial times, with the raising of Seth and his seed into the Aeon. Thus the third descent of the redeemer re-presents for contemporary earthly Sethians the salvation that had been accomplished for their ancestors through the two prior primordial descents, and to grant them a means of appropriating this salvation in the present through the baptismal ascent ritual.

The Sethian conception of a final descent of a redeemer identified as the pre-existent Logos who brings salvation as revealed gnosis rather than transactional redemption through his death on the cross was shared also by Johannine Christian circles. Not long afterwards, Valentinus (140-160 CE) too developed the notion of a pneumatic Christ coming to waken the sleeping spirit in humankind, a notion which lies at the core of his theology. While Valentinus and his successors made Christ the focus of their system and thus were allied principally with Christianity, the Sethians seemed to find their sense of uniqueness in opposition to the Church on the grounds just mentioned. Since these various groups were not isolated from one another but freely made use of texts and ideas borrowed from other groups, the adoption of Christ into their system was only natural, but did not fundamentally change its basically non-Christian nature and inner cohesion.

V. The Platonic Contribution

We have seen that during the second and third centuries, Neopythagorean and Platonic metaphysics made a strong impact on Sethianism, serving to articulate the structure of their world of transcendent beings and explain how the plenitude of the divine world might emerge from a sole, unaided high deity by emanation or radiation, mental self-reflection, and self-generation. Neopythagorean arithmology helped to flesh out the various triadic, tetradic, pentadic, and ogdoadic groupings of the resultant transcendental beings. There is also the unmistakable impact of Platonic cosmology upon the Sethian myth of the primordial creation and anthropogony, especially from Plato's *Timaeus*, whose protological authority stood alongside, and perhaps even above, that of the book of Genesis.

Besides metaphysics, Platonism also offered an established technique—adumbrated in Plato's *Symposium* (210A-212A)—of a self-performable contemplative mystical ascent toward and beyond the realm of pure being. Interest in this technique shows itself in such figures as Philo, Numenius, the author(s) of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and Plotinus. This technique not only supplemented earlier notions of ecstatic visionary ascent associated with the spiritualized Sethian baptismal ritual as in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Zostrianos* and perhaps in *Marsanes*, but also was apparently developed independently of such a baptismal context, as in *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth*. By this means, an older pattern of enlightenment through a revelation or baptism conferred by a descending redeemer figure came to be supplemented and eventually replaced by a self-performable act of enlightenment through contemplative or visionary ascent, whether for individuals (*Allogenes*, *Marsanes*) or for a community (*Steles Seth*).

Another contribution of Platonism to Sethianism may lie in the area of biblical hermeneutics. The late Ioan Culianu suggested that "Gnostic exegesis of Genesis admits a definition strikingly similar to Philonic exegesis: It is an interpretation of a Jewish text according to a set of rules derived from Platonism."[25] As noted in Chapter 1, the Gnostics identified the biblical creator God with the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*, who cannot really be the supreme deity, since he consults a divine paradigm beyond him as the model for his creation; there must be a higher God presiding over the ideal realm who is superior to the creator God of Genesis. In addition, the biblical stress on the sole godhead of the creator, who continually asserts his sole supremacy but is known not to be supreme would raise serious questions about such a god; indeed, such a creator who jealously subjects his creatures and quashes their attempts to attain knowledge of the divine realm is quite the opposite of the ungrudging demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* and a manifestly faulty being. Since the supreme deity could hardly be imagined to be directly responsible for introducing such a lowly figure into divine realm, the Gnostics posit an intermediate link between the supreme God and the lower creator: a feminine principle of multiplicity who may exist in several manifestations ranging from the supreme Mother, God's consort or First Thought, to the actual mother of the demiurge. As an ambiguous or liminal figure, she both gives rise to the creator of a world which was not intended to be as it is and, at the same time, is the source of the divine substance that the creator unknowingly incorporates into it.

Once a supreme God beyond the creator is posited, it is once again Platonism that is called upon to characterize that deity and the means by which it gives rise to the to divine world true essences or forms, and perhaps also to the matter upon which the lower demiurgical creator operates in the formation of this world. According to the *Apocryphon of John*, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes*, the higher maternal principle of intelligible multiplicity emanates from the supreme deity by a process of direct self-reflection, while her lower counterpart, responsible for the multiplicity of the sensible world is subsequently generated at a lower level.

Again, the further structuring of the transcendent world is based on a creative reading of the text of Genesis. In the Gnostic view, as in that of a Hellenistic Jew like Philo of Alexandria, the protology of Genesis occurs on two planes, the heavenly (the creation according to Gen 1:1-2:3) and earthly (the creation according to Gen 2:4 ff.). The first creation story tells of the creation of an intelligible world whose contents form the prototypes for the creation of its perceptible and problematic counterpart in the second account.

Just as the Jewish creator God is subordinated to an even higher supreme deity, so also the demiurge of the *Timaeus* is interpreted in terms of his lower subordinates, the "younger gods": to them the demiurge

25. I. P. Culianu, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (trans. H. S. Weiser; San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 123-125.

assigns the task of combining the rational soul substance created by him with the lower "spirited" and "appetitive" parts of the soul, and of incarnating this mixture into the mortal bodies of humans. In this way, the figure in each tradition responsible for the creation of humans is demoted from its place in the original narrative as a way of explaining the origin of a human condition perceived as defective.

Finally, the Platonic tradition may come into play again as a likely source for the designation of the Sethian heavenly trinity of Father, Mother and Child. *Timaeus* 48E-52D asserts that the metaphysical nature of phenomenal being is that of an image of the Forms, emerging and existing within the volume of its "mother," the "all-receiving nature" of "space," called the Receptacle and Nurse of becoming. In *Timaeus* 50D, Plato introduces a family triad of Form as father, Receptacle as mother, and the images constituting the phenomenal world as offspring or child (ἔκγονος). Like the Platonic triad, the Barbeloite triad of Father, Mother and Child consists of a high deity who remains generally aloof from all that is below, while the mother and son figures are those that are salvifically active in the phenomenal world and share the closest connection with each other. The functions of the maternal member of the Sethian triad, Barbelo, are similar to that of Plato's Mother and Nurse of becoming: she embraces "the All" as its "Womb" (the *Apocryphon of John* BG 54,1-19; II 5,5), she serves as an "eternal space," a "primal ingenerateness," and receives the divine "spark" that gives rise to her self-generated Son. So too the other "Mother" figure, Sophia, takes on characteristics of the Platonic Receptacle when it is said that she became "agitated" when Yaldabaoth extracted some of her power from her, moving to and fro, not "above the waters" (Gen 1:2), but in the darkness of ignorance. Such a division of the Mother figure into two levels has its analogy in the bipartitioning of the cosmic soul or logos into a higher, stable and intelligible level and a lower level in motion that occurs in certain Middle Platonic thinkers such as Plutarch and Numenius.

Plato's *Timaeus* used the family triad to provide a strongly pro-cosmic metaphysics of becoming. The Gnostics, to whatever extent they may have been indebted to the Platonic tradition, may have perceived the Platonic glorification of the Nurse and Mother of Becoming, but turned it against its own intended meaning by treating the parthenogenesis of the cosmos as the foolish and envious act of Sophia, a lower mother

figure. Indeed the mothering metaphor is an ambivalent one in both later Platonism and in Gnosticism. The appearance of any further order of being beyond the spiritual or noetic level could go in two ways: positively, as a necessary and proper display of the power of the priors as in Plotinus' procosmic theories, or negatively, as an attempt to get away from or get more than the fullness of being there, as in the more anticosmic Gnostic myths.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HISTORY OF THE SETHIAN MOVEMENT

In the succeeding chapters, we will investigate more precisely the mutual interaction between Sethianism and the Neopythagoreanism and Platonism contemporary with it. But first, having constructed a hypothetical sequence of Sethian literary activity over a period of some two hundred years, and having delineated the major traditional ingredients of Sethian theology, we will attempt to develop a general history of the Sethian movement. Such an attempt seems justified on the grounds of the overall consistency of mythemes in the treatises that have been surveyed and the strong evidence for a community ritual of baptism.

First, the occurrence of patterns of shared mythic themes, episodes, figures with proper names, and a persistent fund of technical terminology in these treatises is undeniable. There are striking differences among these, to be sure; the name and/or figure of "Seth" appears in most, though not all, of them, although he does not always play the same mythic role therein. One text, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, merely names him as son of Adam and father of the spiritual race, while another, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, portrays him as a heavenly savior who descends into the world in various manifestations to rescue his race.

Second, the majority of these texts contain allusions to ritual practices—especially baptism and its associated rites such as unction, investiture, and naming—that are clearly capable of physical implementation. While some of these allusions could be understood as referring to an otherworldly mystical experience rather than a literal water ritual (as, e.g., in *Zostrianos*), others are surely most naturally understood as references to a physical ritual (e.g., the *Gospel of the Egyptians*). But ritual baptism as a means for incorporation into a new, "elect," social status most naturally implies some kind of social organization and communal identity. In theory it might be possible to imagine private meditation on and strange-sounding mystical references to general Christian baptism, but the allusions to the Five Seals are frequent enough to justify the thesis that there was a special sectarian ritual whose purpose and general procedure was recognizable without further explication by the earliest readers of these texts.

As Michael Williams has pointed out in reference to my previous efforts to delineate a Sethian history, the significant diversity among the Sethian texts as a whole most likely reveals that we do not have the writings of what should be imagined as a single sect or social group, but rather indices to a series of related religious innovations, some of which eventuated in the formation of Sethian communities, but none with the size or perdurance to become "successful" new religious movements.[1] Already in the previous chapters, analysis of the redaction of individual treatises and of the interdependencies among them leads to a resulting relative chronology of the Sethian treatises that implies a definite evolution in Sethianism as it moves sociologically from an identity initially distinct from Christianity, to rapprochement with Christianity, to alienation from Christianity, to association with Platonic circles, to eventual alienation even from these. In a period of two hundred years, what began as a group with a message of redemption through a distinct communal identity and ritual ends up—through a series of setbacks and diversions—in individualistic mysticism with no ritual beyond a technique of personal contemplation. One might almost think of Sethianism as a religion in search of a home. As Williams puts it:

> What Turner has in effect described is a sequence of fascinating, but "failed," innovations.... In his reconstruction, we hardly come out with the same sect with which we began, but this is what we would expect given the relatively short life cycle of most religious innovations. Thinking of these "Sethian" sources in this way also avoids the well-known problem of defining the limits of "Sethianism." But if we view these sources as products from a series of related innovations, there is no particular need to agonize over precisely when the "boundaries" of "Sethianism" have been transcended. We need not abandon the hypothesis that some of these texts—such as, possibly, *Ap. John*—represent attempts to establish a definitive myth for a defined sectarian community. But no single attempt achieved true success. We have to imagine innovators developing new myths that sometimes, but not always, led to new religious communities, the latter lasting for various periods of time, but none really gaining enough converts to amount to a "successful" new religion. The instability to amount to a "successful" new religion. The instability of such groups led to further innovations, incorporating elements from previous mythology but also newly created material. As Turner speculates, the texts in this so-called Sethian group alone may represent remnants from a history of over two hundred years of such innovation. (Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 92-93)

1. M. A. WILLIAMS, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 91-93, in reference to J. D. TURNER, "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 324-351 and "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 55-86.

Bearing in mind the character of the history of Gnostic Sethianism as a series of innovative experiments in the explanation, elaboration, and refocusing of traditional myths and rituals, we proceed to develop such a history. With this in hand, it will then be possible to delineate its relation to Platonism more precisely.

I. HYPOTHETICAL HISTORY OF GNOSTIC SETHIANISM: SIX PHASES

While most British and French scholarship on Sethianism tends to characterize Sethianism as a form of Christian heterodox speculation, most German and American scholarship on Sethianism has characterized its origins, essence and fabric as a distinctly inner-Jewish, albeit syncretistic and heterodox, phenomenon. In addition, an increasing number of scholars have been led to recognize Sethianism's considerable debt to Middle Platonic philosophy, overwhelmingly apparent in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, but readily apparent also in the earlier treatises of the descent pattern. While the evidence of Sethianism's Jewish origins should be apparent from the preceding chapters, much about the social form and identity of this original Sethianism remains completely obscure. Whatever Gnostic Sethianism may have originally been, it is clear that it underwent major influence from traditions that were originally independent of it in both outlook and organization, namely Christianity and Platonism. Since the history of these movements is comparatively better known than that of Sethianism, the evidence of the mutual interaction between these and Sethian traditions can serve to develop a general outline of the history of the Sethian movement.

It seems that the Sethian interaction with Christianity and Platonism can be outlined in six phases:[2]

1. The Sethians likely originated as a second century CE fusion of two distinct groups: (A) one group (the "Barbeloites" of Irenaeus, *Adv.*

2. For the following, see my "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," 55-86.

Haer. I.29) of perhaps Jewish priestly lineage, was occupied with meditative and lustrational practices associated with service in the heavenly temple, and conceived baptismal immersion (the Five Seals) in ordinary water (or its celestial counterpart) as enabling an act of transcendental vision affording a revelation of divine wisdom conferred by Barbelo, the First Thought of the high deity. She was regarded as the second member of a primal divine triad of Father, Mother and Child, from which she had recently descended to confer the baptismal rite of the Five Seals. The structure of this triad and its relation to the earthly realm were articulated according to the Middle Platonic metaphysics of the sort found in Philo and the later Hellenistic wisdom literature. (B) The second group ("Sethites") consisted of certain morally earnest biblical exegetes who styled themselves as the worthy "seed of Seth" who based their sense of a unique role and social status upon certain ancient records containing the sacred history of their primordial enlightenment recently brought to light in the form of certain revelations granted to their ancient ancestor Seth. It would have been the first group (A) that produced the Pronoia monologue of the *Apocryphon of John* and the similar first-person aretalogies now found in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the second (B) that crafted the anthropogonies common to the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and Irenaeus' (*Adv. Haer.* I.30) "Ophites."

2. By mid-second century, amalgamation with certain Christian baptizing groups caused the baptizing "Barbeloites" to construe the pre-existent Christ as the self-generated (Autogenes) Son of Barbelo anointed with the Invisible Spirit's "Christhood" (χρηστία), the same anointing received by the Barbeloites in their baptismal rite by which they are assimilated to the archetypal Son of Man. On the other hand, the earthly Jesus who received Christhood at his own baptism became regarded as the earthly guise in which Barbelo had recently appeared as the divine Logos to confer the saving baptism. It would have been this group that completed the theogony and soteriology common to the *Apocryphon of John* and the narrative sections of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and possibly articulated the myth of the triple descent of the Illuminator in the *Apocalypse of Adam*.[3]

3. In the later second century, these Christianized "Barbeloites" amalgamated with the "Sethites" to form gnostic Sethianism. This led to an additional identification between Christ and Seth as alternative bearers of the true image of God who had recently appeared in the world as the Logos to rescue Jesus from the cross. It was these gnostic Sethians who completed the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Melchizedek*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* into their present form, and composed the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and perhaps *Norea*.
4. Toward the end of the second century, Sethianism gradually became estranged from a Christianity increasingly on the road to a polemical orthodoxy which rejected the rather docetic Sethian interpretation of Christ. It would have been at this point that certain polemical passages were added to the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and perhaps to the *Apocalypse of Adam*.
5. By the third century Sethianism was universally rejected by the heresiologists of the apostolic Church, but in the meantime became

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3. Since the connection between Christ and the divine Wisdom seems better attested and perhaps earlier than that between Seth and the divine Wisdom, I hypothesize that such Christian influence impinged on a proto-Gnostic Sethian movement, the "Sethites," through the medium of a previously Christianized Barbeloite baptismal sect. The point of contact between the two movements lay in the parallel between Seth and Jesus as recent manifestations of a pre-existent divine being who represents the true image of God. It is, of course, quite possible that the direction of influence might have been the reverse, i.e. that an identification of Seth as a manifestation of the divine wisdom might have been a prior and catalytic cause of the similar Christian identification of Christ. Yet such a prior identification for Seth leaves no trace in the earliest Christian literature, whereas the independent identification of Christ with wisdom has left many traces in the earliest Sethian literature. I am aware, of course, that such an argument may merely reflect the absence of Sethian documents demonstrably coeval with the earliest Christian ones and could be interpreted as a naive western cultural myopia biased toward Christian priority. Yet it is easier to see how a wandering sage like Jesus might invite an identification with divine wisdom than it is to see that identification as originally and independently applied to Seth. The coalescence of Christianized Barbeloite mythology with the largely apocalyptic traditions about Seth availed the resulting brand of Sethianism of a powerful set of institutional and mythological symbols for demonstrating the reality of Seth's expected manifestation in contemporary times, and thus a confirmation of their own sacred history.

strongly attracted to the individualistic contemplative practices of second and third century Platonists, a shift that entailed a gradual loss of interest in their primal origins and sacred history and a corresponding attenuation of their awareness of group or communal identity. This phase would have marked the production of the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes* in the early third century.

6. In the late third century, Sethianism also became estranged from orthodox Platonism under the impetus of attacks and refutations from the circle of Plotinus and other Platonists that were just as effective as those of the Christian heresiologists. This phase would have marked the production of *Marsanes* and the untitled text of the Bruce Codex. Thereafter, in the early to mid-fourth century, Sethianism became increasingly fragmented into various derivative and other sectarian gnostic groups such as the Archontics, Audians, Borborites, Phibionites and others, some of which survived into the Middle Ages.[4]

This sequence of stages is similar to the one that seems to emerge from the heresiological witnesses to the Simonian Gnosticism that is supposed to have emanated from Simon Magus. Originating as a local first century cult with Jewish origins, centered on the figure of a Samaritan holy man, syncretistic in tendency but lacking typical Gnostic features, the second century Simonianism described by Justin and Irenaeus seems to have become a typical Gnostic movement with an elaborate myth of origins. Its myth touched on the fate of the soul and the splitting of the original androgyne, whose estranged female component becomes the cosmic Mother who fell into the lower world and was liberated by the supreme pre-existent deity (or the masculine aspect thereof). The transformation of Simon into a Gnostic savior seems due to Christian influence. Subsequently, the encounter between Simonianism and Greek philosophy witnessed in the *Megale Apophasis* preserved by Hippolytus rounds out the metaphysical implications of the myth into a monistic theogony centered on the emanation of the upper and lower cosmos

4. See especially S. GERO, "With Walter Bauer on the Tigris: Encratite Orthodoxy and Libertine Heresy in Syro-Mesopotamian Christianity," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 287-307.

from an infinite divine power coupled with a soteriology based on the recognition of the divine self within.

II. JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND PLATONIC DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXTS

This hypothetical six-phase history of Sethian development occurred within three distinct but not necessarily mutually exclusive socio-historical religious contexts: 1) the Hellenistic phase of second temple Judaism as the milieu for the origin of Barbeloite wisdom speculation and of Sethite speculation on the figure of Seth and his progeny through Noah and beyond; 2) first- and early second-century Christianity, especially in its deutero-Pauline and Johannine manifestations, as the milieu in which Seth became interpreted Christologically; and 3) Middle- and early Neo-Platonism as the milieu for the development of the transcendental metaphysics of many of the Sethian treatises, especially the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

A. The Jewish Context

1. The Pre-Sethian Barbeloites

The name "Barbeloite" is inspired by Irenaeus' ascription to certain "Barbeloites" of the theogony and cosmogony he describes in *Adv. Haer.* I.29, recognized by contemporary scholars as being nearly identical with that found in the four versions of the *Apocryphon of John*. The originating milieu of the "Barbeloite" visionary and baptismal tradition seems to have been the Hellenistic Jewish wisdom schools responsible for the personification of the figure of the divine wisdom and the development of the myth concerning her role in the creation of the world and in the subsequent enlightenment of mankind as described in the previous chapter. To judge from the oldest texts which contain Barbeloite speculation on Sophia, that is, Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* I.29, the Pronoia monologue at the end of the longer versions of the *Apocryphon of John*, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the myth of Sophia's unsuccessful descent in 1 Enoch 42 and her successful one in Sirach 24 were combined into a total of three descents into the lower world, two unsuccessful, and the third, successful, resulting in the final awakening and salvation of those who received her. This is similar to the pattern of the Johannine pro-

logue which the Fourth Evangelist has apparently substituted for the synoptic story of Jesus' baptism.

In Hellenistic Jewish thought, Sophia was identified with the divine name, with the divine Shekinah and the revelation of the divine will in the form of the Torah. Here, Sophia was conceived as a radiant light, the effulgence of the most high, who provided enlightenment for all who would seek her instruction. She is the fountain or spring (cf. Sirach 24; Philo, *Fuga* 195) from which comes the Word like a river (Philo, *Somn.* 2.242; cf. *Fuga* 97), the Mother of the Word through whom the universe came to be (*Fuga* 109; cf. *Trim. Prot.* and the Johannine prologue). She was the overflowing source of light and life, making her instruction shine forth like the dawn. Her human mouthpieces, the sages, are like a canal of water flowing into a river flowing into a sea (Sirach 24:30-32). She made her throne in a pillar of cloud, and she covered the earth like a mist, and those who thirsted for her could drink of her (Sirach 15:2-3: "She will come to meet him like a mother ... she will feed him with the bread of understanding, and give him the water of wisdom to drink"). According to 4 Ezra 14:45-48, the seventy secret books copied by Ezra contain "the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge." Such images could be suggested in Gen 1:2-3 and 2:5, which speak of the Spirit hovering over the face of the Tehom, or a mist covering the earth in the garden of Eden. Her Voice (a *bath qol*) is the revelation of the truth.[5] To be immersed in the water of wisdom is thus to receive true Gnosis. According to Wisdom 7:26, wisdom "is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness."

Surely this is the background of the imagery in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 4,19-29), according to which the Mother Barbelo first emerges as a faithful reflection of the Invisible Spirit's thought in the luminous living water that surrounds him, the same living water into which one is baptized in the rite of the Five Seals:

5. Examples of these revelations of truth would include: "Man exists and the Son of Man" in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 14,14) or the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 59,3), or "This is my beloved Son" in Mark 1:11 (cf. 9:7), where the Voice comes down to water, or the Voices in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 40,8-9; 44,29-32) and the *Apocalypse of Adam* (V 84,4). Indeed it is likely that the *Trimorphic Protennoia* derived its scheme of Voice, Speech and Logos from such a complex of notions.

> **II 4** [19] For (it is) he (the Invisible Spirit) who contemplates [20] [himself alone in his] Light [that] surrounds [21] [him, i.e., the Fount of] living water. And [22] [he provides all the aeons], and in every direction he [23] perceives [his image, gazing at] it [24] in [the Fount of the Spirit]. It is he who puts his desire in his [25] [luminous water that is] the Fount of [26] [pure luminous] water surrounding him. And [27] [his Thought became] actual and revealed herself (as Barbelo) [28] [and stood at rest and appeared] before him [29] [in the brilliance of] his light.

It seems that the rather consistent aquatic imagery applied to Sophia in the wisdom texts, especially Sirach and Philo, has been applied by "Barbeloite" authors to a baptism in living water which leads to enlightenment.[6] Both *Trim. Prot.* and the Pronoia hymn of the *Apocryphon of John* portray the divine First Thought as thrice descending to chaos to rescue her fallen members. In the context of Barbeloite baptism, the movements of descending and ascending in the course of the rite would lend themselves to a spiritual interpretation in which the descent into the water could be conceived as a participation in Barbelo's descent into the

6. Not all the aquatic imagery in the Sethian texts is positive, symbolic of illumination and enlightenment. The *Apocalypse of Adam* envisions a pollution of the waters of life, and may indeed understand the waters to which the Illuminator descends in the similes of the thirteen kingdoms to represent materiality. In contrast to the transcendent, luminous living water in which Barbelo first emerges as a faithful reflection of the Invisible Spirit's thought (cf. *Ap. John* II 4,18-28), Sethian treatises also portray dark and chaotic waters at the lowest level of the cosmos which are said to have been produced by a shadow deriving from the downward inclination of Sophia, and out of which the demiurge produces the physical cosmos as merely a pale and inauthentic reflection of the divine aeons (e.g. *Zost.* VIII 9,16-10,18; *Hyp. Arch.* II 87,11-20 and parallels). Such negative valuations of water might arise from a negative estimation of otherwise quite neutral aquatic imagery found in the biblical tradition. Thus Sophia's identification with a kind of mist that covers the earth, as in Sirach 24, might be interpreted negatively, as an obscuring cloud, or perhaps as having something to do with the primeval waters of chaos, or the Tehom, over which the Spirit of God hovered at the creation. In this connection, Sophia might be regarded as a lower being, perhaps even a fallen being. On the other hand, her characterization as a life-giving kind of water would lead to a higher estimation of Sophia as the source of enlightenment, indeed an enlightenment that could be received during baptism. As a pre-existent cosmogonic agent, one would expect Sophia to have contact with both the heights and the depths of the cosmos, to have dwelt in high places, to "have made the circuit of the vault of heaven and have walked in the depths of the abyss, in the waves of the sea, in the whole earth" (Sirach 24:3-6). An excellent example of the kind of ambiguity that might arise from Sophia's contact with such extremes is offered by the *Thunder: Perfect Mind* (NHC VI,2), which may have Sethian affinities.

chaotic materiality of the earth or of the bodily prison (the Pronoia monologue of the *Apocryphon of John* II 30,11-31,25) or of "the psychic and somatic thought" of unenlightened persons, whose souls had made this descent at their incarnation (the *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 48,7-14). Likewise, ascent from the water could be conceived as a participation in Wisdom/Barbelo's return to her heavenly dwelling.

> **XIII 48** [7] I gave to him] from the Water [of Life, which [8] strips] him of the Chaos [that is [9] in the] uttermost [darkness] that exists [inside] [10] the entire [abyss], that is, the thought of [the corporeal] [11] and the psychic. All these I [12] put on. And I stripped him of it [13] and I put upon him a shining Light, that [14] is, the knowledge of the Thought of the Fatherhood.

For the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, this Living Water is the Voice-aspect of Protennoia which her Logos-aspect pours out on her members below, the same water that the *Apocryphon of John* identifies with the fount of luminous water streaming from and surrounding the supreme Invisible Spirit.

It was suggested in Chapter 6 that the antecedents of Barbeloite baptism may lie in a Jewish sacerdotal and sapiential environment. The Sethian texts provide strong evidence for the existence of a baptismal rite which at some point involved immersion in ordinary water, for which I can think of no more likely origin than the priestly lustrations connected with service in the temple, whether earthly or heavenly. The Barbeloite rite was also the occasion for a vision of the heavenly realm and immersion in the heavenly light or living water that radiated from the supreme deity, in much the same way as apocalyptic visionaries saw the intense light radiating from the divine throne and chariot and streams of living water flowing from the heavenly temple.

Although Irenaeus' summary of Barbeloite teaching makes no mention of the baptismal rite of the Five Seals, it is likely that the baptismal rite entered the complex of Gnostic Sethianism through these "Barbeloites" rather than through the Sethites, since there is no evidence for any baptismal practices connected with speculation on the figure of Seth that can be dated with any reliability prior to the Nag Hammadi Sethian texts themselves. Among Sethian treatises that do not mention the figure of Seth at all, such as the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, it is the figure of Barbelo who confers the saving baptism, and even in those treatises where Seth is said to confer this baptism, it is clear that he is acting as an emissary for Barbelo.

One of the most difficult problems in uncovering the nature of the Sethian baptismal rite is to determine the significance of the symbolic term that sometimes seems to designate the rite, namely the "Five Seals."[7] At the very least, the term suggests some kind of fivefold symbol or action of "sealing" with the name of divine beings, perhaps five in number, which somehow marks one as under their protection. Despite a certain tendency to propose pentadic groupings of transcendent beings, all these treatises show awareness of some kind of supreme triadic principle. Taken together, the only really natural candidate for a pentad of powers in these treatises would be Autogenes together with the Four Luminaries over whom he presides, a group that *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* call the Self-generated Aeons. The only Nag Hammadi Sethian treatises that mention the Five Seals, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, conceive the Four Luminaries not only as the aeonic dwellings of the primordial Sethites, but also the intended future dwellings of the earthly Sethians. It is therefore tempting to suggest that they together with Autogenes form the group of five entities that may have been the inspiration for the concept of the Five Seals.[8]

The Five Seals are appropriated according to two earthly ritual patterns, that of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, where the sequence and components of the rite are rather similar to contemporary Christian elabora-

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7. The term "the Five Seals" occurs in *Ap. John* II 31,24; IV 49,4; *Gos. Egypt.* III 55, 12; 63,3; 66,31; IV 56,25; 58,6; 58,27-28; 59,27-28; 66,25-26; 74,16; 78,4-5; the Untitled treatise of Codex Bruce 32,10 [Schmidt-MacDermot]; and *Trim. Prot.* XIII 48,31; 49,27-28; 47,29; 50,9-10. The number "Five" must have had some ritual significance, as is suggested by the five doxologies in *Gos. Egypt.* (IV 59,13-29; III 49,22-50,9; 53,12-54,6; 55,16-56,3; 61,23-62,12), as do the fivefold structure of the post-baptismal prayer in *Gos. Egypt.* (III 66,8-22), the five triads of names in *Trim. Prot.* (XIII 48,15-35), and the fivefold baptism of Zostrianos in the name of the divine Autogenes (VIII 6,7-7,22; 53,15-55,25: one each for Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai and Eleleth, and a final one for Autogenes or, in *Gos. Egypt.* III 65,23-26, for Yoel).

8. According to these treatises, the Four Luminaries are the aeonic instantiation of the luminous Living Water that surrounds the Invisible Spirit, and Autogenes stands in and is anointed with that light. Indeed, according to the liturgical materials occupying the last third of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 62,24-68,1), one is baptized in and receives the name of Autogenes. It is also these five beings upon which Zostrianos "stands" in his five successive baptisms in the name of Autogenes, even though *Zostrianos* has dropped the term "Five Seals" altogether.

tions of the baptismal rite,[9] and that of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (and the Pronoia monologue of the *Apocryphon of John*), which incorporates features similar to ancient enthronement ceremonies. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, where baptism is clearly central, the emphasis seems to lie on the *descent* of the holy powers upon the baptizand, while in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where investiture, enthronement, and rapture into the light are central, the emphasis lies upon the *ascent* of the baptizand to the light (cf. also the "raising up" in the *Apocryphon of John*'s Pronoia monologue).[10]

2. The Pre-Sethian Sethites

The oldest detectable form of Sethite lore would most likely be that form of speculation on Seth which is common to the Sethian Gnostic treatises and other non-gnostic Seth traditions, such as Josephus' (*Antiquities* 1.2.3) account of the monuments made by Seth, and the sort of testamentary literature to be found in the *Apocalypse of Moses* and versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve*. On this basis, one might consider the Sethites to have been people who understood themselves as the distant offspring of Seth, their primordial ancestor. Seth had been primordially

9. There must have been a ritual invocation of the various powers involved in the baptismal rite, in response to which these powers appear to those about to receive baptism. Apparently the invocation is followed by an act of renouncing the world and the powers of the thirteen aeons after which occurs during the actual baptism. This baptism may have involved a fivefold immersion during which the baptizand uttered a fivefold prayer to the Child of the Child Esephech, who in this context appears as Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus the Living Water. On completion of the baptism, the baptizand, having now "become light," acknowledges that the name of Autogenes is now upon him. Then the whole proceeding concludes with the ritual acts of recognizing the Mother's grace by stretching out the hands while folded. The receipt of the purifying name of the Son is then acknowledged by the statement that the incense or ointment of life has been mixed with the water of the archons; it is conceivable that this may constitute a veiled reference to some act of pre-baptismal anointing by scented oil which upon immersion would perforce become mixed with baptismal water.

10. The emphasis on ascent is obviously also central to *Zostrianos*, although its nomenclature for the holy powers and the central position it gives to baptism in the name of Autogenes is probably inherited from the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. So too in *Melchizedek*: while the centrality it affords to baptism and the nomenclature of powers therein invoked resembles the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the basic mission of Gamaliel is to "[rapture]" the congregation of Seth, the same role assigned to him by the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.

enlightened through the receipt of secrets concerning the future course of history revealed to Adam after he had eaten of the tree of knowledge. Adam had also related to Seth his vision of the throne or chariot of God borne upwards by four radiant eagles. In the *Apocalypse of Moses*, this vision is based upon the vision in Ez 1:1-28 of the four living creatures and certain wheels that bore up a crystalline firmament above which there was enthroned a being in the form of Man, at which point Ezekiel is addressed by the divine Voice. In the *Apocalypse of Moses*, after the death of Adam, Eve prophesies a coming judgment by water and by fire, and Seth is instructed to preserve for posterity the details of her and Adam's life on tablets made of stone (safe from the flood) and brick (safe from the conflagration).[11] The content of this revelation might be Adam's vision of the divine realm and Eve's vision of the ultimate salvation of Adam's soul (*Life of Adam and Eve*), or, according to Josephus, it might be some other form of wisdom, perhaps that of Seth and his seven pre-Noachic sons concerning ultimate cosmological and astrological secrets and the final destruction of the cosmos by water and fire (*Antiquities* 1.2.3). After the time of Seth, his seven sons promulgated a pure race until the time of Noah, when, as discussed in the previous chapter, human corruption and sexual *mixis* between angels and human women provoked the coming of the flood.

In the hands of the Gnostic Sethians, one could imagine how this story of Seth could be transformed. Seth's vision of Adam's salvation in the highest heaven would be embellished: the four radiant eagles might have inspired the four Sethian Luminaries or aeons Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithai and Eleleth; above them would have been located the God "Man" according to the vision of Ezekiel; the divine voice which spoke to Ezekiel would become for the Sethian Gnostics the voice which announced that "Man exists, and the Son of Man." As will be argued below in the discussion of the Sethite-Barbeloite synthesis, it seems that

11. According to Josephus, the stone pillar was still to be found in the land of Seiris, which would be the land of the Sethites (somewhere in the Transjordan, cf. Num 24,17-18); in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* II 92,8-14 the demiurge tells Noah to land the ark on Mount Sir, evidently the Sethian version of the biblical Mount Ararat. Such mountains are depositories of sacred books: cf. *Allogenes* XI 68,20-23 and the Mount Charaxio (cf. χάραξ, a pointed stake or something carved, or perhaps inscribed) of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 68,10-22. On these matters, see G. A. G. STROUMSA, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Nag Hammadi Studies 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 116-123.

the Sethites must have conceived the celestial prototypes of Adam and Seth to comprise the second and third members of a supreme divine triad of Man, the Son of Man and the Son of the Son of Man. Their earthly counterparts, the primordial figures of Adam and Seth, as well as Seth's seven sons were, like Enoch (mentioned in Sethian literature only in *Melchizedek* IX 12,8), mysteriously transported to heaven and preserved from the flood as well as from the subsequent conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah, while those after Noah were saved on the ark, and would propagate the seed of Seth on earth. Adam would have been elevated to be with the highest Luminary Harmozel, and Seth with the second highest aeon Oroiael; his antediluvian sons, Enosh through Lamech, and perhaps Noah and certain of his sons, would be with the third highest Luminary, Daveithai, while the fourth Luminary Eleleth would eventually enjoy the company of all the seed of Seth who from the time of Noah onwards would remain pure until their own deaths.

But evil was not entirely wiped out in the flood. In the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the offspring of Shem and most of the progeny of Ham and Japheth are sinful Sethites who are infected with the same evil that had affected the much earlier generation of Cain (who originated from the archontic rape of Eve but were destroyed in the flood), since they subscribe to Noah's pledge of fealty to the archon Saklas; they will go on to form the "twelve kingdoms" of Israel whose seed will enter into the thirteenth kingdom of "another people" (i.e., the Christian Church), all thirteen of which fail to recognize the incognito appearances of the Illuminator and thus defile the "water of life" by confusing his final advent with a merely human figure who originates from a carnal, procreative birth and undergoes a baptism in mere water (e.g., Jesus). On the other hand, the pure race of Seth is to be found only among 400,000 "great men" from the offspring of Ham and Japheth, who reject Saklas' dominion and instead "enter another land and sojourn with those men who came forth from the great eternal knowledge" (i.e., with the heavenly seed of the heavenly Seth; V 73,16-20); they are the "kingless generation" who have recognized the Illuminator's incognito descents (at the flood, the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the final judgment of the archons) and now receive his name (Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus) upon the true living water in the holy baptism of knowledge. As G. Stroumsa has shown,[12] the Sethian account of the persistence of evil people who persecute the pure seed of Seth is further explained by the myth of the intercourse of the sons of God with the daughters of men in Gen 6:1-4. According to 1 Enoch, these sons of God are the "watchers" who sire a race of homicidal giants, and are then sent down to the Abyss. In subsequent Jewish exegesis, these underworld watchers become devils like Azazel or Shemihazah who sexually tempt the pure race of Seth to engage in polluted intercourse with the corrupt offspring of Cain. Other Sethian traditions, however, such as that behind the account in Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.2.3, allow the opposite kind of identification, namely one between the watchers or sons of God in Gen 6:1-4 and the pure seed of Seth who bore the image of God, and to whom was revealed the (beneficial) knowledge of ultimate cosmic secrets.

Given the dilemma of Seth's human progeny, existing since primordial times as a persecuted but pure strain of Seth's seed, living among, but apart from the corrupt descendants of the cursed Cain or perhaps of other Sethites devoted to the creator God, it would be natural to develop a hope or belief in the eventual salvation of this race, consisting in its extrication from such people who constantly tempted the true Sethites to procreatively mingle with their own race, and thus lose their awareness of their special ancestry. Such extrication would of course be a dramatic, apocalyptically-conceived act, in which the remaining pure Sethites would be reunited with their primordially enlightened counterparts now existing in the aeons above, perhaps even raptured into the third or fourth of the Sethian Luminaries in close proximity to their ultimate ancestor, Seth. And it would not be surprising if the agent of this redemption were conceived as an eschatological manifestation of Seth himself or of his angelic representatives, sent below on great clouds of light to execute judgment on the powers of the god of the thirteen aeons. While there are no extant Sethite works outside of the Nag Hammadi Sethian treatises that explicitly portray this form of deliverance, the description of the salvific role of Seth in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* or of the Illuminator in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, which do not seem to presuppose the complete mythological apparatus found in the gnostic Sethian treatises, may represent such pre-gnostic Sethite tradition.

12. STROUMSA, *Another Seed, passim*, esp. ch. VI.

The Gnostic Sethian versions of this salvific activity structure it into four distinct epochs of saving history marked by the flood, the conflagration and the judgment of the powers as in the *Apocalypse Adam* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. Or the epochs are marked by three distinct manifestations of an exalted wisdom figure who twice descends in primordial times, and finally in the end time as the Logos (as in the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*). What makes the Sethian adoption of this history of deliverance distinctive is their self-identification with the fallen members of the Mother on high, or with "the unshakable race" descended from Seth, who since the flood and conflagration live simultaneously on earth and in the aeons of the Four Luminaries until the judgment of the Archons at the eschatological advent of the savior, be it Seth or some other envoy from the divine world. Between the conflagration and the final judgment of the Archons, the Sethians keep in contact with their heavenly counterparts by means of revelations Seth or one of his alter-egos left behind inscribed on steles of brick and clay, or on wooden tablets, or in certain books,[13] all preserved on a special mountain.

B. The Christian Context: The Pre-Sethian Christian Barbeloites

I have now described two basic and originally independent movements: 1) the Sethites with the sacred history of their primordially enlightened race based on an interpretation of the myths about Adam, Seth, the primordial seed of Seth, and the fate of Seth's later progeny

13. It is interesting that recently published fragments from Qumran Cave IV contain fragments from a Vision of the Haguy or Hagoy (חזון ההגוי), a "Book of Memory" (ספר זכרון) that is associated with or may consist of certain "mysteries of what we shall be" (רז נהיה). The Damascus document (CD 10.6; 13.2) specifies that every judge must be expert in the "Book of Hago;" elsewhere it is required study for every youth (1QSa 1.7), to be studied during a third of the evening throughout the year (1QSerek 6.7): "For the law (*mehoqeq*) is etched by God for all [...] sons of Seth. And the Book of Memory (*zikkaron*) is inscribed before him (God) for those who observe his word. And it (Book of Memory?) is the Vision of the Haguy (*hehaguy*), as a Book of Memory. And he (Seth?) bequeathed it to Enosh with the people of the spirit. Because he created it as a sacred blueprint (*tabnith*). But Haguy had not as yet been entrusted to the spirit of flesh since it (spirit of flesh) had as yet not known the distinction between good and evil" (4Q417 f2i:15-18), cited in B. Z. WACHOLDER and M. G. ABEGG, eds., *A Preliminary Edition of the Unpublished Dead Sea Scrolls: The Hebrew and Aramaic Texts from Cave Four, Fascicle Two* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), xiii.

that survived the flood along with Noah, and 2) the Barbeloite speculation on the divine name and wisdom and its adoption of baptism as a means of receiving enlightenment from the divine wisdom. It seems likely that the link between Seth and baptism stems from neither Sethite nor Barbeloite mythology, but from the encounter of both with Christian speculation.

1. The Catalytic Role of the Christian Movement

I suggest that the gnostic Sethianism reflected in the Nag Hammadi codices results from a fusion between the Barbeloites and the Sethites, which seems to have been catalyzed by the initial Christianization of the Barbeloite baptizing movement. The Barbeloite precursors of the Gnostic Sethians would most probably have sustained their initial encounter with Christians who were fellow practitioners of an initiatory baptismal rite in which the initiate acquired a new identity. These Christians would have understood their own baptism as a rebirth into a higher mode of existence and would have understood the baptism of Jesus as the occasion through which the pre-existent savior had inaugurated his revelatory mission in the world, if not the point at which the Son of God appeared in the world and entered into him.

Such an encounter seems to have caused the Barbeloites to identify the third member (Autogenes) of their Father-Mother-Child triad with the pre-existent Christ and to identify the Mother's third appearance in the world with the descent of the Logos who bore the Five Seals, appearing in the form of Jesus (as in the *Apocryphon of John*) and even raising him from the cross (as in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*). Given this identification, a further encounter between such Christianized Barbeloites and Sethite groups who claimed to be the beneficiaries of revelations received through a recent manifestation of the primordial Seth, might have suggested for these Sethites an identification between Seth—who originally had nothing to do with baptism—and the Christ who had descended upon Jesus at his baptism. By an analogy between Christ and Seth as equivalent manifestations of the divine image or of the Logos, this figure becomes naturally conceived also in the form of Seth himself or of Seth in the guise of Jesus. This mythology and the rite interpreted by it were only gradually connected with the figure of Seth and the sacred history relating to him.

2. The Relation between Sethian and Johannine Christianity

Central to this development was the wisdom Christology of the Church, according to which Jesus was understood as the locus for the earthly appearance of the pre-existent divine Wisdom in its most articulate form.[14] This is most obvious in the case of the Johannine prologue, where the appearance of Jesus on earth is spelled out in terms of the myth of the repeated descents of Wisdom, appearing as the Logos to seek an earthly dwelling place; after some initial failure, this Logos finally pitched his tent, not among the sons of Jacob in Zion, but within the flesh of Jesus.[15]

Most discussion of the relationship between Sethian theology and the Johannine prologue has centered on the prologue's linguistic and conceptual parallels with the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Pronoia monologue of the *Apocryphon of John*.[16] One may amplify this to include the

14. 1 Cor 1:24, 30; etc.

15. Of course, as R. BULTMANN (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* [trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray *et al.*; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971], 19-31) has hypothesized, this story may also have been an inner-Jewish phenomenon, since he supposes that the original form of the Johannine prologue was applied to John the Baptist as the Logos appearing in flesh, and subsequently reapplied to Jesus by the Johannine Christians. That such identifications of John were made is also suggested by the association of John's appearance with that of the daystar in the Lukan Benedictus (Lk 1:78; cf. Sirach 24:32). According to the earliest synoptic form of the narrative of Jesus' life, Jesus' story begins with his baptism by John in the Jordan, at which time the divine voice proclaims him to be the Son of God.

16. Most scholars argue that the prologue depends on *Trim. Prot.* or on one of its sources: G. SCHENKE, "Die dreigestaltige Protennoia: Eine gnostische Offenbarungsrede in koptischer Sprache aus dem Fund von Nag Hammadi eingeleitet und übersetzt vom Berliner Arbeitskreis für koptisch-gnostische Schriften," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 99 (1974), 731-746; C. COLPE, "Heidnische, Jüdische und Christliche Überlieferung in den Schriften aus Nag Hammadi, III," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 17 (1974), 107-125; C. A. EVANS, "On the Prologue of John and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*." *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), 395-401; J. M. ROBINSON, "Sethians and Johannine Thought: The *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Prologue of the Gospel of John," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism. Vol. II: Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton (Supplements to *Numen* 41; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 643-662; "Discussion," 662-670; G. SCHENKE, *Die dreigestaltige Protennoia herausgegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 132; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1984); G. ROBINSON, "The Trimorphic Protennoia and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel," in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World: In Honor of James Robinson*, ed. J. E. Goehring, C. W. Hedrick, J. T. Sanders, and H. D. Betz (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1990), 37-50; J. D. TURNER, "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism, and Early Christianity*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 55-86, esp. 65-66; *IDEM*, "Introduction" to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII, XIII*, ed. C. W. Hedrick (Nag Hammadi Studies 28, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 371-401; esp. 385-386. For arguments that *Trim. Prot.* depends on the Johannine prologue, see Y. JANSSENS, "Une source gnostique du prologue?," in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, rédaction, théologie*, ed. M. de Jonge (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1977), 355-358; E. YAMAUCHI, "Jewish Gnosticism? The Prologue of John, Mandaean Parallels, and the Trimorphic Protennoia," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 91; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 467-497; M. TARDIEU, *Écrits gnostiques: Codex de Berlin* (Sources gnostiques et manichéennes 1; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1984), 340; P. HOFRICHTER, *Im Anfang war der "Johannes Prolog": Das urchristliche Logosbekenntnis—die Basis neutestamentlicher und gnostischer Theologie* (Biblische Untersuchungen 17; Regensburg: Pustet, 1986), 215-221.

17. R. BULTMANN, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray *et al.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 19-31; cf. *IDEM*, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 and 1955), esp. 2.3-14.

larger question of the relationship between Sethianism and Johannine Christianity in general.

Nearly all discussion of the religious environment of the Fourth Gospel is indebted to the observation of R. Bultmann that the Johannine discourses have their closest parallels in the literature of the originally Syro-Palestinian sect of the Mandaeans and in the *Odes of Solomon*, which are rich in baptismal imagery and the ontological dualism typical of gnostic revelations; like John's Gospel, they employ a myth of the saving descent of the (gnostic) Redeemer from the world of light into the darkness and ignorance of our world to bring enlightenment.[17] Furthermore, Bultmann held that the figure of the Logos in the prologue can be explained only by a mythological—that is gnostic—context, not by a philosophical or even quasi-philosophical one. Although few scholars today would maintain Bultmann's analysis in its original form, certainly any post-Bultmannian analysis of the Fourth Gospel must reckon with its possible relationship to Gnosticism.

In the Johannine prologue, one may note a tendency towards periodizing the history of the activity of the Logos into three phases in much the same way that the activity of Pronoia in the Pronoia monologue and the activity of Protennoia in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* are structured: the primordial act of creation and shining into the darkness (Jn 1:1-5), the

initial entrance into the created order which did not recognize him (vss. 9-11), and the incarnation of the Logos in which he finally makes the Father known (vss. 12,14,16,18). Just as in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where deliberate Christological interpretation occurs in the third part describing the final descent of the Logos, so also the specifically Christological content of the Johannine prologue occurs in the third part, and in both compositions this shift to Christological content is marked by the concept of the Logos "tenting" among men.

Elaine Pagels[18] has recently pointed out that the Johannine author polemicizes against various interpretations of Gen 1:1-3 according to which, upon the appearance of the primordial light on the "first day" prior to the world's creation, there appeared in that light (φῶς) the form of the primal human (φώς). Thus the primordial light is implicitly present in human nature. Various exegetes, including Philo, the authors of the Hermetic *Poimandres*, the *Gospel of Thomas* (logia 1-3, 17-19, 22, 61, 77, 85), the *Apocryphon of John*, and certain rabbis, interpreted Gen 1:27 as showing that this primordial human form was manifested in two stages: at first, when "God created *adam* in his image," he created a singular being—"in the image of God he created *him*"—who is identical with the primordial light of Gen 1:3, but immediately thereafter, humankind devolved into a dual species, male and female—"male and female he created *them*." The *Apocryphon of John* (BG 29,6) identifies the primordial light with Barbelo, "the first Human," and later (II 14,16-20), after the Sophia gives rise to the Archon, the divine voice—which in Genesis says "Let there be light"—identifies the primordial light by informing the authorities that "Man exists, and the Son of Man," whereupon "the Holy Father appeared to them in human form" and the abyss was shaken by "the light of his image that appeared" (II 14,33; 15,3). Here, the primordial light is both *anthropos* and *theos*. For various Christian exegetes, that light might also be identical with the preexistent Christ. Against such views, the Johannine prologue (Jn 1:3) *denies* that the primordial light of Gen 1:1-3 was available through the image of God implicitly present in human nature: the divine image resides exclusively in the *logos*, which only ages *later* became manifest in the figure of Jesus. Instead, the primordial light shone into an uncomprehending darkness (Jn 1:5); far from being sharing a natural affinity

18. E. PAGELS, "Exegesis of Genesis 1 in the Gospels of Thomas and John," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118.3 (1999), 477-496.

with humanity, when the light came into the world, humans failed to recognize it (Jn 1:10), and when it came to "its own," they rejected it (Jn 1:11). From its original appearance until John the Baptist, the primordial light failed to penetrate the world's darkness; it manifests its glory, not at the beginning of the cosmos or in primordial humanity, but only when it "became flesh and dwelt among us" in the person of Jesus.

Like the Johannine prologue, the Pronoia monologue concluding the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* portrays three successive manifestations of Pronoia as ("the richness of") the primordial light into the world of darkness, and—although the foundations of Chaos are shaken at her appearances—as in the prologue, she remains unrecognized by the denizens of the lower world during her two initial manifestations, but on the third succeeds in being recognized by those she comes to raise into the light. Unlike the prologue, her failure to be recognized is due, not to the natural opposition of darkness to light or to a rejection on the part of her "own," but to her intentional self-concealment during the first two descents, while on the third descent she clearly announces her presence. Thus, like the Johannine Prologue, the Pronoia monologue does not regard cosmic or cosmogonical manifestation as a path to salvation or to the knowledge of God.

But when the triple-descent motif of the Pronoia monologue was taken up by the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, all conceivable instances of the light's failure to be manifested were eliminated. Thus on Protennoia's first descent she says:

> **XIII 36** [4] I [descended to the] midst of the underworld [5] and I shone [down upon the] darkness. It is I who [6] poured forth the [water]. It is I who am hidden within [7] [radiant] waters. I am the one who [8] gradually put forth the All by my [9] Thought. It is I who am laden with the Voice. It [10] is through me that Gnosis comes forth. [I] [11] dwell in the ineffable and [12] unknowable ones. I am perception and knowledge, [13] uttering a Voice by means of [14] thought. [I] am the real Voice. [15] I cry out in everyone, and they recognize [16] it (the voice), since a seed indwells [them]. I am the Thought of the Father and through [18] me proceeded [the] Voice, [19] that is, the knowledge of the everlasting things. I [20] exist as Thought for the [All]—being joined [21] to the unknowable and incomprehensible Thought— [22] I revealed myself—yes, I—among [23] all those who recognize me. For it is I [24] who am joined with everyone by virtue of [25] the hidden Thought and an exalted <Voice>, [26] even a Voice from [27] the invisible Thought. And it is immeasurable [28] since it dwells in the Immeasurable One. It is a mystery; [29] it is [unrestrain-

able] [30] by [the Incomprehensible One]. It is invisible [31] [to all those who are] visible [32] in the All. [It is a Light] dwelling in [33] Light.

XIII 40 [29] But now I have come down [30] and reached down to Chaos. And [31] I was [with] my own who [32] were in that place. [I am hidden] within [33] them, empowering [them and] giving [34] them shape. And [from the first day] until [35] the day [when I will grant mighty power] [36] to those who [are mine, I will reveal myself to] [37] those who have [heard my mysteries], **41** [1] that is, the [Sons] of [the] Light.

On her second descent, Protennoia again succeeds in making herself known:

XIII 45 [21] And I hid myself in everyone and revealed [myself] [22] within them, and every mind seeking [23] me longed for me, for it is I [24] who gave shape to the All when it had no form. [25] And I transformed their forms [26] into (other) forms until the time when a form [27] will be given to the All. It is through me that the Voice [28] originated and it is I who put the breath [29] within my own. And I cast into [30] them the eternally holy Spirit and [31] I ascended and entered my Light.

On her third descent as Logos, Protennoia disguises herself by appearing in the likeness of everyone, humans and cosmic powers alike, until she reveals herself to her own, who immediately receive her:

XIII 47 [5] (The first time) I [told all of them about [6] my mysteries] that exist in [the [7] incomprehensible], inexpressible [Aeons]. I taught [them the mysteries] [8] through the [Voice that [9] exists] within a perfect Intellect [and [10] I] became a foundation for the All, and [I [11] empowered] them. The second time I came in the [Speech] [12] of my Voice. I gave shape to those who [took] shape [13] until their consummation. The third [14] time I revealed myself to them [in] [15] their tents as Word and I [16] revealed myself in the likeness of their shape. And [17] I wore everyone's garment and [18] I hid myself within them, and [they] did not [19] know the one who empowers me. For I dwell within [20] all the Sovereignties and Powers and within [21] the Angels and in every movement [that] exists [22] in all matter. And I hid myself within [23] them until I revealed myself to my [brethren]. [24] And none of them (the Powers) knew me, [although] [25] if is I who work in them. Rather [they thought] [26] that the All was created [by them] [27] since they are ignorant, not knowing [their] [28] root, the place in which they grew.

In contrast to the Johannine prologue, as the primordial light, Protennoia first illumines the primordial darkness, is subsequently recognized and received by all those to whom she gives shape, and finally appears to her own as Logos. From the origin to the present, she is actively omnipresent and recognized by all except those cosmic powers who claim the

cosmos as their own creation, while in reality she is the Father of the All who only *appears* as the Logos "in their tents." In contrast to the traditional view of Jn 1:14, the Logos *appeared* in the "*likeness* of their shape" but did not become flesh as the "orthodox" believe. In fact, according to XIII 50,12-13, the Logos was only disguised as the "orthodox" Christ, who had to rescue Jesus from the "cursed" (not redemptive!) cross and restore him to the "dwelling places of his Father." In contrast to the Johannine prologue, rather than being the eschatological agent of salvation, Jesus is its recipient.

As is well known, Bultmann also argued that the insertion of references to John the Baptist in Jn 1:6-8 and 1:15 is best explained by regarding the original prologue as a hymn composed in honor of the Baptist as the definitive advent of the Logos or the divine light and wisdom into this world.[19] After the introduction of this hymn into the Johannine community, the Fourth Evangelist adapted it to his own purposes by the insertion of these verses in such a way that the Baptist is demoted to the rank of a mere witness to Jesus as the true light coming into the world.

Just as in Sethian texts, the Fourth Gospel also spiritualizes baptism. In contrast to the synoptic accounts, Jesus is not said to be baptized in the ordinary waters of the Jordan by John the Baptist, who merely witnesses the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus. Although Jesus is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit (Jn 1:33), the Fourth Gospel identifies this Spirit both as his words (6:63) and as that which will recapitulate his words (14:26; 16:13). In the Nicodemus dialogue of Chapter 3, it seems that the evangelist may have taken a phrase from a traditional Christian liturgy of baptism as a requirement for entrance into the community ("Unless one is born [from above? again?] of water and the Spirit, he cannot *enter* the Kingdom of God," Jn 3:5) and transformed it into a form more nearly parallel with the Sethian doctrine of baptism as

19. The portrayal of the deliverer or his forerunner as a light dawning (ἀνατέλλειν, ἀνατολή) or entering the world is also found in a less suspiciously gnostic context in the *Testament of Levi* 18 concerning the advent of the messianic priest-king, and also in the Benedictus of Luke 1:76-79 concerning John the Baptist. Besides drawing on the Jewish motif of the descent of the divine wisdom as presented in Sirach 24 and 1 Enoch 42, such texts may also draw on the tradition of the eschatological advent of the star and scepter of Num 24:17, often interpreted as referring to the advent of a royal and a priestly Messiah by the Dead Sea sect and others (cf. 1QM 11,6; 1QSb 5,20-25; 4Qtestim 9-13; CD 7,9-21; also T. Judah 24 and Rev 22:16).

a visionary ascent: "Unless one is born from above, he cannot *see* the Kingdom of God" (Jn 3:3). Toward the end of Chapter 3, we learn that while John the Baptist was baptizing at Ainon near Salim, Jesus was in Judea baptizing and making more disciples than John (although the evangelist or a later redactor denies the tradition that Jesus himself baptized; cf. Jn 3:22-30 with 4:1-2). This tradition seems to place Jesus in Judea and John in Samaria, according to a recent proposal for the location of Ainon near Salim,[20] although there is the interesting claim in Jn 8:48 that Jesus himself was a Samaritan. In Jn 4:14, 23, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well that he dispenses a water that becomes in one who drinks of it a spring welling up to eternal life, and that true worshipers worship the Father in Spirit and truth, a theme echoed again in Jn 7:38 to the effect that springs of living water will flow from the heart of the one who believes in him. Indeed, this Living Water seems to be identical with either the Spirit or Jesus or both.

In this regard, we have frequently noted that Sethianism also identified Jesus with the Living Water. According to the *Apocalypse of Adam* (V 85,22-31) the Gnostic is to receive a higher baptism in Gnosis through the Logos-begotten ones and the imperishable illuminators Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus, surely a barbarization of the name "Jesus of Nazareth." According to the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 63,22-64,3), the Father's Pronoia established the holy baptism (the Five Seals) through the Logos-begotten Jesus whom the great Seth had put on. And according to the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 46,16-19) the Logos who descends with the Five Seals is the one who pours forth Living Water upon the Spirit below from out of the spring of Living Water, which is said to be the Voice aspect of Protennoia.

In the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, these baptismal descents of the Logos as Seth or Christ are initiated by the divine First Thought (Protennoia/Barbelo) of the supreme deity, an exalted Sophia figure, who communicates with her members by Voice or Word. As we have seen, it is the Hellenistic Jewish wisdom movement that forms the conceptual background for these clusters of metaphors for wisdom such as living water, voice, word, fount, thought, wisdom and so forth. Such concepts would have been attractive means for Barbeloites and other similar first century baptismal sects to interpret the spiritual significance of their baptismal rites. As suggested in Chapter 4 (p. 153), it is likely that the composer of the original aretalogy underlying the *Trimorphic Protennoia* derived the scheme of progressive revelation through the successively more articulate media of Voice, Speech and finally the actual Word of Protennoia from Stoic linguistic theory applied to illustrate the revelatory function of the divine Wisdom.

20. For discussion, see C. H. H. SCOBIE, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 163-177.

It may not be going too far to suppose that the Fourth Evangelist may have similarly interpreted the traditional reference to John the Baptist as the "Voice crying in the wilderness" (Jn 1:23; cf. Is 40:3) as signifying a less articulate stage of revelation in preparation for the advent of Jesus as Word; certainly at a later time Heracleon (*apud* Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* VI.20) took John the Baptist to be "the Voice, akin to the Logos, which becomes the Logos, just as woman is transformed into man." According to the anti-Baptist polemic of Jn 1:6-8,15,19-37 and 5:33-35, John the Baptist is not the true light coming into the world, but is demoted to the rank of a mere preparatory lamp or, even more, only a Voice crying in the wilderness whose only subsequent function is to witness to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus. John is the preparatory Voice, audible but not fully intelligible, while Jesus is the fully intelligible and effective Word. This indeed constitutes a certain parallel with the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, in which the revelation of the Voice likewise precedes the revelation of the Logos. In her manifestation as the Logos, Protennoia becomes her male aspect.

The common clustering of concepts concerning a baptismal rite in association with a celestial ascent, the reception of revelation through the partaking of Living Water, and revelation through the divine Voice followed by the advent of the Logos leads one to believe that materials employing them such as the Fourth Gospel and the earliest Barbeloite treatises must have been originally composed in a similar baptismal environment characterized by speculation on the significance of the words spoken and the waters involved in the rite sometime in the late first or early second century CE.

As to the geographical locality of this compositional activity on the part of both Sethians and Christians, perhaps even Johannine Christians, one thinks of the Jordan valley generally and perhaps especially of Samaria. While the link between the Sethians and Samaria is rather

shadowy,[21] the association of some of the tradition of the Fourth Gospel with the Samaritans has gained plausibility, since unlike the Sethian materials, Samaria is actually mentioned in the Gospel. One thinks particularly of the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, which is set in a baptismal context.

One of the more convincing attempts to trace the history of the Johannine community and to explore its relationship to the Samaritans is that of Raymond Brown.[22] He locates the origin of the Johannine community among Palestinian Jews, including followers of John the Baptist, who believed that Jesus had fulfilled well-known Jewish expectations, e.g. of a Messiah or of a prophet like Moses. Around the mid-first century, there developed in the Johannine community a higher Christology that went beyond Jewish expectations by conceiving Jesus as a pre-existent divine savior who had descended from heaven and become human (Jn 4:42; 5:18; cf. 8:48). Brown thinks that this second group consisted of Jews with anti-temple views (Jn 4:21) and their Samaritan converts

21. W. BELZ, "Samaritanertum und Gnosis," *Gnosis und Neues Testament*, ed. K. W. Tröger (Berlin: Evangelische Verlag, 1973), 89-95 has used the tradition of the judgment upon the sons of Seth related in Num 24:17, as interpreted in the Damascus Document (CD 7,9-21) and in the Samaritan tradition (*Asatir* II.3) that Seth founded Damascus, to show that the Samaritans of Damascus claimed to be the true descendants of Seth (the people of the old Northern Kingdom of Israel) whom the "scepter," the prince of the Qumran community, was coming to destroy. Since no orthodox Samaritan sources reflect this Qumran tradition, Belz suggests that it was a Samaritan sectarian tradition, and that it was the Dositheans (followers of a Samaritan prophet Dusis) who considered themselves as sons of Seth, which may have some relation to the attribution of the Sethian treatise the *Three Steles of Seth* to Dositheus (VII 118,10-19). While a connection of the Sethians with the Samaritans via the Dositheans is only a suggestion, certain Dositheans did in fact constitute a baptizing sect of the first and second centuries CE (Abul Fath, *Annals* 151-159; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1.57; 6.11; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.22); cf. J. MONTGOMERY, *The Samaritans* (New York: KTAV, 1968 [1907]), 255-263. The pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 2.15-24 and *Recognitions* 1.54-63 & 2.8, though of questionable historical value, link Dositheus with John the Baptist and Simon Magus, at least suggesting an original association of Gnosticism and baptizing sectarianism with first century Samaria.

22. R. E. BROWN, "Johannine Ecclesiology—The Community's Origins," *Interpretation* 31 (1977), 379-393; *IDEM*, "Other Sheep not of this Fold," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978), 5-22; *IDEM*, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). See also J. L. MARTYN, *History & theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2nd rev. ed., 1979) and *contra*, M. HENGEL, Die johanneische Frage (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1993).

(4:35-38) who may have been a product of the Hellenist mission to Samaria and its own anti-temple theology (Acts 7:47-49; 8:4-8). This high Christology led to friction between the Johannine community and the Jewish synagogues and ultimately the expulsion therefrom of the Johannine community (Jn 9:22; 10:31-33; 16:2).

It seems that for some period of time the Johannine community coexisted with the Palestinian and Syrian components of the apostolic churches, yet was vocally conscious of possessing a higher insight into the nature of the savior by maintaining his pre-existence and origins from the world above to which he had always belonged. This insight was spelled out in the original production of the Fourth Gospel around 90 CE. Matching this insight, which tended to relativize the significance of the crucifixion and thus shows affinity with various gnostic Christologies, there was also a much more individualistic ecclesiology based on the possession of charismatic gifts, which tended to relativize the need for the ecclesiastical offices more typical of the apostolic churches. Similarly, the community's view of the cross as the vehicle of the savior's exaltation (the "lifting up" of Jesus) tended to relativize the importance of the resurrection appearances to the original twelve to which the apostolic church appealed so much. Fundamentally, the teacher of the Johannine community after the death of its first generation of leaders (including almost certainly the "Beloved disciple"), was the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth whose possession would allow any Johannine Christian to claim a more immediate and superior understanding of Jesus than that of any outsider.

Of course, such a situation could easily lead to conflict over the correct interpretation of the Gospel and its tradition, and so after the turn of the first century, the Letters of John allow us to detect at least two wings of the Johannine church in addition to the Christians of the wider apostolic church who were probably in touch with the Johannine churches. Brown characterizes one wing as represented by the author of the Johannine letters and his insistence on Jesus' advent in the flesh and future parousia, and the other, more dominant, wing as secessionists from the original community who denied the full humanity of Jesus and the importance of the earthly life of either Jesus or the believer. The smaller group strove to maintain contact with the apostolic churches and may have facilitated this contact by a subsequent revision of the Gospel (such as the addition of Chapter 21) to bring its somewhat gnosticizing Chris-

tology into line with the apostolic emphasis on the saving significance of Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection as witnessed by the earliest apostles. This group may have succeeded in winning the acceptance of the Gospel among such second century traditionalists as Irenaeus at a time when it was in danger of being claimed for Gnostic Christianity by Sethian and Valentinian exegetes such as Heracleon. The final redactional stage of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* would be another instance of such a secessionist Christology.

Such a line of development allows one to imagine that both Johanninism and Sethianism could easily have grown up alongside one another and have had common roots in the milieu of first century baptist sectarianism. While Sethianism seems to know nothing of John the Baptist, its earliest "Barbeloite" manifestation certainly was strongly influenced by a highly mythological interpretation of baptism as indeed were the Johannine churches of Palestine and Syria and the Pauline churches of Asia Minor (cf. Col 2:8-15 etc.). It must have been in such a baptismal sectarian environment strongly influenced by the Hellenistic Jewish wisdom tradition that the myth of the revelatory descent of wisdom into an unenlightened world was worked out in systematic fashion. Joseph Thomas long ago suggested that these early baptismal sects represented a spiritualizing protest against a failing or extinct sacrificial temple cultus,[23] which reminds us of such groups as the Samaritans, the Essenes and also the anti-temple Jews that Brown (see note 21) thinks responsible for the introduction into the Johannine community of a higher, somewhat gnostic Christology in the mid-first century.

While we know next to nothing about the baptismal ritual of the Johannine community, one does note a cluster of baptismal motifs, such as light, Living Water, the descent of the Logos and the Voice, familiar also in the Barbeloite precursors of Sethianism. These elements were perhaps already associated with the prologue of the Fourth Gospel even when, on the hypothesis of Bultmann, it existed separately from the Gospel, perhaps as the property of the disciples of John the Baptist. If so, the prologue may have been introduced into the community by these persons at its very inception. And the various Samaritan traditions of the Gospel may have been introduced either by these persons, or slightly later, by the Samaritan converts of the anti-temple Jews with their high

23. J. THOMAS, *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie 150 av. J.-C. – 300 ap. J.-C.* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1935).

Christology. At this time, the prologue would have been made to refer to Jesus.

Such a scenario suggests a certain parallelism between the Johannine and Sethian movements, in that both would have originated as non-Christian sects. The one was in the process of developing a spiritualized baptismal rite as a means of achieving a spiritual enlightenment conferred by their master John the Baptist whom they believed was manifested among them as the light or Logos. The other was in the process of developing a spiritualized baptismal rite as the vehicle of enlightenment conferred by their spiritual ancestor Seth as the divine Logos. While these proto-Johannines composed the hymn honoring the Baptist, the earliest Barbeloite precursors of the gnostic Sethians produced the Pronoia monologue found at the end of the *Apocryphon of John* and perhaps an expansion of this in the form of the tripartite aretalogy that forms the underlying structure of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.

Both movements would have undergone Christianization of a sort that involved a high Christology: in the later first century, the Johannines—on Bultmann's hypothesis—substituting Jesus for John the Baptist as the divine Light and Logos, and the Barbeloites at first identifying the Logos with Barbelo's third and decisive manifestation; in the late second century gnostic Sethians would carry this a step further by identifying the logos-begotten Jesus as the final form of the manifestation of Seth. In the early second century, the Johannine community bifurcated into two schools of interpretation concerning the significance of Jesus' earthly form, ministry, death and resurrection as presented in the Fourth Gospel, a conflict that seems to be documented in the Johannine Epistles, and comes to a head in the Valentinian interpretations of Ptolemy and Heracleon two generations later. Given Brown's hypothesis, sometime around the middle of the second century, it is possible that the group behind the *Trimorphic Protennoia* made common cause with the ultra-high Christological thinking of those whom the author of 1 John considered to be secessionists who rejected the propitiatory blood of the cross in favor of the spirit of truth received in baptism, and joined in the struggle over the correct interpretation of the Gospel, directing themselves against the apostolic churches with whom the adherents of the author of the Johannine Letters had made common cause. It would have been at this point that the last part of the third subtractate of the *Trimor-*

phic Protennoia underwent the final redaction in which it took on the specifically Johannine polemical language it now bears.

At this point the almost purely positive appeal of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* in the mildly Christian dress of its second compositional stage was modified in a polemical direction. No longer a purely evangelical or proselytizing instrument on behalf of Sethianism, it was now aimed at challenging and reinterpreting the orthodox apostolic claims of the Great Church concerning Christ and the salvation offered by him. With this move, the Sethians were targeting members of the apostolic churches as candidates for the immediate enlightenment and salvation tendered by Sethian Gnosis, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* had become a weapon in the competition for souls.

C. The Fusion of Sethites and Barbeloites to Form Gnostic Sethianism

In the later second century, Christian "Barbeloites" seem to have merged with the "Sethites," thereby giving rise to the "classical form" of gnostic Sethianism characteristic of the present versions of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Apocryphon of John*, *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Melchizedek*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and *Norea*. It seems that the combination of the Sethite sacred history with the Barbeloite doctrine of the Father, Mother, Son triad must have taken place as a further instance of the historicization of the descent of its third member at a time when the Barbeloites had been rather thoroughly Christianized. The natural affinity between such Barbeloite Christians and Sethites would have been their common proclamation of the historical appearance of a pre-existent revealer or redeemer, respectively Jesus or Seth as alternative bearers of the true image of God, and their common tendency to develop heterodox interpretations of the Old Testament generally at variance with those of the wider apostolic churches and the majority of tannaitic rabbis. If Sethians appropriated the doctrine of the Father, Mother, and Son triad and the baptismal interpretation of the third descent from the Barbeloites, this must have happened at a time when the third descent of Barbelo as Logos had already been historicized through its identification with a quasi-human figure. If so, the identification of Christ with the Sethite figure of the Son of the God Man—who might have been identified either as Adam or Seth—would have been a natural

one, and the resulting Son figure would have been associated with a revelatory descent and quite likely the conferral of a saving baptism.

1. The Identification of the Logos

Indeed, baptism seems to have had not a little to do with this development. For example, Christianity maintained that the convert was baptized in the name of Jesus. But there would have been many candidates for this name besides Jesus: e.g., Wisdom, the Logos, the heavenly or second Adam, the Christ, the Son, and so on. If Christ is the name of Jesus, then to be baptized in the name of Jesus means to put on and be saved by Christ in the same way that one might infer that, at his own baptism, Jesus likewise put on Christ or the Son. This assumes that the name Christ refers to an entirely transcendent being, not quite identical with the crucified Jesus of the Christians, and that the true designation of the Son as Christ took place not at the historical baptism in the Jordan, but, in Sethian terms, at the primordial anointing of the Self-generated Son with the goodness (χρηστός / χριστός) of the Invisible Spirit before the world ever came to be. But the Sethian Christ generally remains above the earthly historical process, while it is the Logos, perhaps in the form of Seth, who enters human history as the bearer of a saving baptism, and who puts on and thus "saves" Jesus.

In the orbit of Hellenistic Jewish authors such as Philo, the Son of God would have been understood as the Logos. In fact, Philo even speculates that the Logos could be thought of as the Son of God and of his Mother Wisdom (*Fuga* 109). In the hands of our hypothetical Barbeloites, the Son of God and of the Mother Barbelo would likewise be the Logos, the third member of the Father Mother Son triad. On the other hand, for the Sethite sacred history based on the family triad of Adam, Eve, and Seth, the Son of God (i.e. the Son of the God Man) would be Adamas, the divinized Adam. According to this logic, Seth would be the Son of the Son of Man, a term which, although present in *Eugnostos the Blessed* (only in V 13,12-13), is not encountered in specifically Sethian texts. Instead, one finds that the figures of both Adamas and Seth are excluded from the Sethian Gnostic supreme triad of the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo and the Self-begotten Son.

2. The Identity of the Autogenes Son: Christ or Adam or Seth?

This of course leads to a problem in the Gnostic Sethian texts which may stem from a fusion of Barbeloite and Sethian mythologies and demonstrate the catalytic role of Christianity: why do the major theogonies such as the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* exclude Adamas and his son Seth from membership in the supreme trinity of Father, Mother, and Son? After all, as Stroumsa has shown,[24] any reasonably alert reader of Genesis could have related Gen 5:3 (LXX), "When Adam had lived a hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth" to Gen 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,'" in such way as to conclude that Seth was either the son of the heavenly Adam or of God himself.

The answer must be that, when the Sethites adopted the Barbeloite primal triad as a means of accounting for the ultimate divine principles in their system, the third member of that triad, the Autogenes Son, had already been interpreted in Christian terms as none other than the Christ. In the clearly Christianized theogonies of the *Apocryphon of John*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the Autogenes Son, produced as a light from the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo—whom a Sethite might expect to be Adamas—is identified as Christ (the one "anointed" with the Father's "goodness" [χρηστός]), while Adamas, the perfect Man, is subsequently generated at the good pleasure of the Autogenes Son at the same time as or slightly prior to the creation of the Four Luminaries.

As R. Van den Broek[25] has shown, while the *Apocryphon of John* identifies Christ as the Autogenes, the Son of the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo, Irenaeus' Barbeloite account (*Adversus Haereses* I.29), places the Autogenes and his son Adamas below the supreme triad as lower beings produced by Ennoia and Logos—leaving only Christ as the "Son" of the supreme Father-Mother-Child triad—yet it also attributes a degree of praise and honor to the Autogenes unusual for a lower aeon but entirely befitting a member of the supreme triad: he was "sent forth

24. STROUMSA, *Another Seed*, 50-53.

25. R. VAN DEN BROEK, "Autogenes and Adamas: The Mythological Structure of the Apocryphon of John," in *Gnosis and Gnosticism: Papers read at the Eighth International Conference on Patristic Studies (Oxford, September 3rd-8th, 1979)*, ed. M. Krause (Nag Hammadi Studies 17; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 16-25.

... as a representation of the great light, and ... greatly honored, all things being subject to him," language that derives from an interpretation of Psalm 8:4-6 in which the God Man has glorified the Son of Man by making him little less than himself and giving him dominion over all things. Thus it appears that the Barbeloite system must have originally conceived the Autogenes as a much higher figure than Irenaeus' account allows.

3. The Fusion of the Barbeloite and Sethite Supreme Triads

Van den Broek goes on to hypothesize that behind the present Barbeloite Father-Mother-Child triad, there lay an older triad of Father, First Man and the Son of Man, or—in terms of the Ophite system of Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30.1—the First Man, Second Man, and Third Man. I would urge a modified version of this hypothesis, namely, that such a triad lay behind, not the Barbeloite triad, but rather a triad of supreme principles that was developed by the Sethites independently and alongside the Barbeloite Father-Mother-Child triad. In my view, the Father-Mother-Child triad (whose nomenclature was probably derived from Plato's *Timaeus*), was original to the Barbeloite Wisdom speculation, and the Barbeloite encounter with Christianity had already resulted in the identification of this Child with Christ before their rapprochement with the Sethites, who seem to have possessed already such a triad of male figures, Father, First Man and Son of Man.[26]

Perhaps this implies a still prior stage when, instead of a Father, Mother, Son triad, there was only a dyad of Man and the Son of Man, little less than God. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.29 and the first part of the *Apocryphon of John* teach a trinity of Father, Mother and Son. But in the second part of the *Apocryphon* the divine voice ("Man exists, and the Son of Man") that announces the existence of a supreme dyad is identified as that of the Father, the supreme "Man" (BG 47,14-48,10), while the longer version implies a supreme triad (Man-Mother-Son of Man) by identifying the voice as that of the Mother-Father Barbelo (II 14,13-34). In *Eugnostos the Blessed*, there is a supreme pentad: the

26. Although the earliest Sethite speculation may have conceived the members of its triad of God, Adamas and Seth as androgynous beings, they were in all probability given male names. Indeed, Theodoret (*Haer. fab. compend.* I.13) ascribed Irenaeus' (*Adv. Haer.* I.30.1) Ophite triad of three males, First and Second Man plus Third Male, to the "Sethians, whom some call Ophians and Ophites."

supreme Fathers Propator and Autopator, and just below them a triad Immortal Man, Son of Man (the heavenly Adam) and Son of the Son of Man (probably Seth) each of whom are accompanied by a consort named Sophia. The same nomenclature is found also in Irenaeus' (*Adversus Haereses* I.30.1) "Ophite" myth, which features a supreme triad consisting of the First Man, the Second Man, and a Third Man (Christ) begotten by the Second Man upon a lower figure, the Holy Spirit, the First Woman. But if one includes among the highest beings the First Man's (feminine) Thought that gives rise to the Second Man (*Ennoian autem eius progredientem, filium dicunt emittentis*), then one has in effect a primal pentad of First Man, his Ennoia, Second Man, and Third Man, above the First Woman.

Evidently there is a good deal of variation here, and one wonders whether these notions go back to a common scheme. It may be that the author of *Eugnostos* inherited a scheme involving only a supreme triad of androgynous beings—Immortal Man, Son of Man, and Son of the Son of Man—above which he superimposed the figures of Propator and Autopator on philosophical grounds, namely that the sequencé of sons implied a procreative fatherhood inappropriate for (even androgynous) beings that transcend the visible realm: "the Lord of the Universe is not rightly called "Father" but "Forefather," for a Father is (merely) the origin of what is visible, so he is (actually) the unoriginate Forefather" (III 74,20-75,2). In the case of the "Ophite" myth, a procreative origin for the Second Man is excluded by conceiving him as the instantiation of the First Man's Ennoia, which implies the androgyny of either the Second or the First Man. Again, the fact that both the First Man and Second Man beget the Third Man as the son of the First Woman (the Holy Spirit) suggests that First Woman is really an alternative feminine aspect of the Second Man, and was located below the first two "Men" merely on the grounds that Gen 1:2-3 ("and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters") places the Spirit just above the waters of the Tehom (*sub superiori spiritu segregata elementa, aquam, tenebras, abyssum, chaos, super quae ferri Spiritum dicunt*; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.30.1).

Assuming the Ophite myth has hypostatized the feminine aspect of an original triad of three androgynous males into separate female principles (First Ennoia, First Woman, Holy Spirit), one might conclude that its author, like the author of *Eugnostos*, drew upon a myth that featured

only a supreme triad of androgynous "Men." While the first part of the *Apocryphon of John* features the "Barbeloite" triad of Father-Mother-Child, the second part of the *Apocryphon* implies a supreme triad of males when the divine voice announces the names of its first two members, "Man and the Son of Man"—the supreme deity and the divine Adam—who are subsequently supplemented by Seth as son of the son of Man. I suggest that this triad of androgynous "Men" was developed by the Sethites independently of the Christianized Barbeloite movement, and that it originally signified the supreme deity and the celestial counterparts of the earthly Adam and Seth.

One thus arrives at the trinitarian doctrine of the present *Apocryphon*: Invisible Spirit = First Man; Ennoia/Pronoia/Barbelo/Merciful Mother-Father = Second Man; and Autogenes/Christ = Third man. Though portrayed predominantly as a female, the masculine aspect of Barbelo's manifestly androgynous (BG 27,3; II 5,9) nature is frequently symbolized by her epithets, First Man (BG 27,19-20; 27,10; NHC II 5,7), Triple Male (BG 27,21; II 5,8), Mother-Father (NHC II 5,6-7; 6,16; 14,19; 19,17; 20,9; 27,33), and elsewhere Male Virgin (XIII 46,21; XI 59,6, in *Zostrianos* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* identified as her lower double, Youel).[27] It is possible that the tradition of Barbelo's androgyny originated from an identification between the (feminine) Ennoia and the perhaps already androgynous Second Man of the Ophite myth, or between the Son of Man and his feminine aspect Mother of the All (Protogeneteira Sophia) featured in *Eugnostos*. In the process, the articulation of the bisexual nature of the Son of Man into separate Mother and Son figures effectively demoted the Son of Man, Autogenes or Adamas, to a third level below the Mother.

Analogy with the myths of the "Ophites" and *Eugnostos* suggests that originally the supreme triad of the Sethites may have consisted of the supreme deity, Adam, and Seth, and that the Sethite fusion with the

27. According to K. L. KING, "This description of Barbelo, the 'Mother' figure and consort of the Father, makes it clear that 'she' is not unambiguously feminine" ("Sophia and Christ in the Apocryphon of John," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. K. L. King [Studies in Antiquity and Christianity 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988], 158-176, here 162). "As the Father's thought and providence, Barbelo *is* the Father, yet she faces him as his feminine counterpart. Her/his identity can be described only in paradoxical terms that join identity and distinction. 'She is both the Father and herself,'" J. J. BUCKLEY, *Female Fault and Fulfillment in Gnosticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 41.

Christian Barbeloites resulted in the demotion of Adam and Seth to the level of the Four Luminaries by securing Barbelo and Christ as the second and third members of the triad. While the systems of the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* equate the third member with both Christ and Autogenes, Irenaeus' Barbeloite myth demotes both Autogenes and Adamas to a lower rank, leaving only Christ as the supreme son. The present Gnostic Sethian arrangement of the Father-Mother-Child triad, followed by Adamas and Seth as a fourth and fifth figure, results from introducing into the Sethite triad of three androgynous humans ("Men") the Barbeloite figure of the Mother. As in the Ophite myth, this was done by conceiving the androgynous supreme Father's thought as his female aspect, and making it into an independent hypostasis, perhaps even his consort, the Mother. The effect of ranking her just below the supreme Father would be to demote the figure of the First Man Adamas from second to third place in the hierarchy; in effect, Adamas would logically become her self-begotten (Autogenes) Son. Yet, because the Barbeloite system had been Christianized, instead of being identified with Adamas, the Autogenes Son is identified with Christ, with the result that Adamas and his son Seth are demoted yet another notch down the hierarchy, thus excluding them altogether from the primal triad.

Sethites	*Eugnostos*	*Ophites*	*Barbeloites*	*Gnostic Sethians*
Father = "Man"	Propator	First Man = Father	Father	Invisible Spirit
Son of Man = Adamas	Autopator	Second Man = Ennoia	Mother = Barbelo	Mother = Barbelo
Son of the Son of Man = Seth		First Woman = Spirit		
	Immortal Man	Third Male = Christ	Son = Logos = Christ	Son = Autogenes Christ (Logos)
	Son of Man/Adamas			Adamas (Logos)
	Son of Son of Man			Seth

4. The Demotion of the Logos

It is perhaps ironic that Christ, the second Adam of Christian speculation, usurped the place of the first Adam of the original Jewish Sethite speculation who, according to Wisdom of Solomon 10:1-2, was the first-formed father of the world whom Wisdom delivered and empowered to rule all things. Christ was the third member of the supreme Barbeloite triad, but in the present Sethian myth, Adam is located in the highest of the Four Luminaries over which Christ presides.

Even more ironically, the theogony of the *Apocryphon of John* places the Logos, whom Christian tradition identified with Christ, at a rank even lower than that of either Christ or Adamas. The *Gospel of the Egyptians* follows suit; although it introduces the Logos before Adamas, it places them both after—and thus below—the great Christ of the supreme triad, and has them cooperate together to produce Seth and the Four Luminaries. Assuming that the Barbeloite speculation had provided the model for the Gnostic Sethian primal triad, one would expect the Logos, which the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 37,4-8) identifies with the Son as the final mode of Barbelo's self-manifestation—and thus with the third member of the Barbeloite triad—to have occupied a similar rank throughout the Sethian corpus. Instead, the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* exclude the Logos from the primal triad, and its rank seems to vacillate between the fourth and fifth place.

In Gnostic Sethianism, the varying position of the Logos owes to the attempt to map the old Sethite triad of God, First Man and Son of Man upon the Barbeloite triad of Father, Mother and Son. Part of this mapping would involve an equation between the Logos and a Son figure of some sort (as, e.g., in Philo), but there are now at least three candidates for this Son: 1) Christ, the Autogenes Son of the Christianized Barbeloite theology; 2) Adamas, the Son of God in the older Sethite speculation, and 3) Seth, son of Adam. Logically, the Son would be Adamas or Seth in a non-Christian context, but in a Christian context, the Son could only be Christ or Jesus. The Logos might be associated with any one of these Son figures, but curiously, the Sethian texts do not regard it as identical with any of them. Rather, the Logos becomes an independent hypostasis and a kind of instrument serving other figures.

Among the Sethian texts, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* maintain a close relationship between the Logos and Jesus; either the Logos directly rescues Jesus from the cross or Seth, by means of a "Logos-begotten body," puts on Jesus. In the *Trimorphic Protennoia* the divine First Thought in the form of the Logos is the source of enlightenment through the baptism of the Five Seals. Similarly in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 63,21-64,3), it is the Mother Pronoia who establishes the holy baptism brought by the logos-begotten Jesus whom the great Seth has put on. Thus in both treatises, the primary actor

behind the scenes is the divine Mother, who appears in the world as the Logos in certain guises.[28]

The only general statement that can be made seems to be that, whether in Barbeloite, Sethian Gnostic, or Christian speculation, the Logos is consistently conceived to be the divine figure who actually descends into this world for the salvation of the contemporary Gnostics. Because the Logos is always active in this world, it is always ranked at the bottom of the hierarchy of unfallen divine beings, and is associated with the appearance of the historical savior, whether it be the Jesus of the Johannine prologue, the Son who puts on Jesus in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, or the Seth who puts on Jesus in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.

D. The Platonic Context: A New Alliance

As Christianity, influenced by communal aspirations inherited from Jewish and Roman models of hierarchical authority, spread through the Mediterranean world, it took on a determination to propagate and defend itself as an institution. Increasing hostility between it and other movements which initially shared with it certain features, Christological and otherwise, caused movements like the Sethians to adopt novel Christologies, such as the identification of Christ with the pre-existent Seth, or Autogenes, or the Triple Male Child, in an effort to demonstrate the interpretive power of their own theologies. At first, the Sethians developed these Christologies in the light of their own sacred history. While Christological concepts could clearly depict the eschatological advent of Seth in their own era, to adopt these meant also to reinterpret them in a Sethian way and thus challenge a more "orthodox" Christological interpretation. Although this Christological experimentation preserved for a time their separate conscious identity as an elect body, in the long run it must have earned the hostility of the increasingly better organized institution of the "orthodox" Church. But as the position of the Sethians was

28. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion* 39.3.5: "But from Seth by descent and lineage came Christ, Jesus himself, though not by generation; rather he appeared in the world miraculously. He is Seth himself, who visited the race of men then and now because he was sent from above by the Mother." (ἀπὸ τοῦ Σὴθ κατὰ σπέρμα καὶ κατὰ διαδοχήν γένους ὁΧριστὸς ἦλθεν αὐτὸς Ἰησοῦς, οὐχὶ κατὰ γέννησιν ἀλλὰ θαυμαστῶς τῷ κόσμῳ πεφηνώς, ὅς ἐστιν αὐτὸς ὁΣὴθ ὁ τότε καὶ [Χριστὸς] νῦν ἐπιφοιτήσας τῷ γένει τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀπὸ τῆς Μητρὸς ἀνωθεν ἀπεσταλμένος).

weakened by the increasing intensity and sophistication of orthodox Christian heresiological attacks and by the Church's successful co-option of the epic history of Israel, some Sethians seem to have become less attached to their sacred history and rites, and more obsessed with their ultimate goal, union with the divine. Such Sethians moved from emphasizing the eschatological history of salvation that gave them a unique place in history towards the sort of individualistic mystical practice that becomes the center of interest in a new wave of Sethian literary production, the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

1. The Platonizing Sethian Treatises

According to these new Platonizing treatises, the advent of salvation was no longer conceived in terms of the salvific visitations of the divine Mother Barbelo who bore the baptismal enlightenment of the Five Seals; rather she remained above, beckoning these Sethians to exercise a self-performable ecstatic visionary ascent undergone by and then vouchsafed to them by Seth or Allogenes or Zostrianos or Marsanes or Nicotheos or others. As the *Apocalypse of Adam* (85,18-23) suggests, the baptismal waters had become polluted; *Zostrianos* (131,2-14) warns the errant multitudes not to be "baptized with death." The Platonic tradition of contemplative ascent suggested the possibility of a new, non-earthly form of transcendental baptism; the author of *Zostrianos* implemented it.

Probably the first of the Platonizing Sethian treatises, *Zostrianos* is an essentially pagan Greek apocalypse produced in the late second or early third century that effected a rapprochement between traditions at home in Gnostic Sethianism and a Middle Platonism of a strongly Neopythagorean bent. It seems to have been composed as a way of exploiting Platonic metaphysics and epistemology to account for the nature of the Sethian divine and cosmic hierarchy and how the visionary and auditory component of the baptismal rite of the Five Seals afford a saving enlightenment and direct experience of the divine without recourse to the specifically biblical and Christian traditions typical of the earlier Sethian literature. This incorporation of a contemplative mystical ascent into the Sethian tradition seems indebted to the influence of Neopythagorean Middle Platonism, whose representatives such as Philo, Numenius, Valentinus, Julian author of the *Chaldaean Oracles* and probably many others had a strong bent towards contemplative mysticism that they found already in Plato. It is important to note that this religio-

philosophical movement may have been inspired by the old Pythagorean regimen of an ascetic life, withdrawal into closed conventicles, vegetarianism, secret symbols, glorification of the tradition and its ancient founder, slavish respect for past tradition, arithmology and meditation. Its goal was assimilation to God. This Neopythagorean regimen and its speculation would have appeared most attractive to the early ascetic baptismal circles in which Sethianism, Christianity, and many other movements arose.

An urbane devotee of Sethian lore who sought the soul's release from the clutches of material and somatic preoccupations, the author of *Zostrianos* composed this treatise on the basis of mythologumena drawn from the theogonical and baptismal doctrine most evident in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and from Middle Platonic theological interpretations of Plato's dialogues—especially of the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Timaeus*, and *Parmenides*—that were available in popular Platonic tracts, epitomes or commentaries, such as the source *Zostrianos* shares in common with the later fourth century Christian theologian Marius Victorinus, which seems to have been an anonymous *Parmenides* commentary.

2. The Response of the Platonists

Like these Platonic tracts, the Greek *Zostrianos* also came to circulate in Plotinus' seminar in third century Rome, where it was not only critically appraised—leading to the refutation of certain of its revelatory claims by Amelius and Plotinus himself—but also seems to have caused Plotinus to tighten up certain aspects of his own metaphysics, particularly the "intelligible biology" by which he explored the role of life and the truly living being in the origin and nature of his intellectual hypostasis. By attributing its doctrine to an ancient revelation granted to Zostrianos, great-grandfather of Zoroaster (identified with Er the Pamphylian from whom Plato himself, according to *Republic* X, inherited insights concerning the structure of the other-world),[29] *Zostrianos* implicitly

29. The name Zoroaster occurs only in the colophon (VIII 132,9), which need not have been an original part of the treatise, but added only later. According to Arnobius, *Adversus nationes* I.52 ("that Bactrian, whose deeds Ctesias sets forth in the first book of his History; Armenius, grandson of Zostrianos [MS Osthanes] and Pamphilian friend of Cyrus"; cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* V.14.103.2 and other late sources), Zostrianos was the father of the Armenios said by Plato (*Republic* X 614B) to be the grandfather of Er the Pamphylian who related the experience of his own death in battle; this Er was at some point assimilated with Zoroaster. The

claimed an authority for its Platonic metaphysics and approach to the knowledge of transcendent reality that was more ancient than Plato himself. For Plotinus, this raised the issue of the ultimate source and authority for his own doctrine as well as that of his Platonic predecessors and of Greek philosophy in general. As far as Plotinus was concerned, the entire metaphysics of the Platonizing Sethian texts was a grand misrepresentation of Plato's *Timaeus* (esp. 39E) and a violation of sound philosophical method; rather than flatly asserting the authority of revealed truth as the basis of their novel interpretations, the authors and users of such texts ought to present their own opinions with courtesy and proper philosophical method (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6).

The treatise *Allogenes* partly made up for these perceived defects by achieving greater clarity in its metaphysical exposition and avoiding misrepresentations of the *Timaeus* by omitting any account of the world's creation (as well as references to non-philosophical ritual practices like baptism and excessive ecstatic utterances) and shifting the emphasis to the more refined, less mythological epistemological doctrine of the *Symposium* and *Parmenides*; in this way it may have avoided some of the more penetrating criticisms from Plotinus' circle without abandoning the role of the divine beings essential to Sethianism and its commitment to the authority of revelation. On the other hand, given its incantatory and doxological character, a treatise like the *Three Steles of Seth* would have, and apparently did, entirely escape the notice of these Platonists even though it traded in the same metaphysics and ascensional technique. *Marsanes* gives signs that it was written later than Plotinus, possibly near the time of Iamblichus and Theodore of Asine; only the first twenty of its 68 extant pages delve to any extent into the transcendental metaphysics of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, mostly by way of summary rather than exposition. Perhaps at a still later date, the untitled treatise of Codex Bruce, while it contains some of the technical meta-

figure of Iolaos, Zostrianos' putative father (cf. 4,10), is attested as far back as Hesiod (*Theogony* 102; 323; 340; 467) as a great warrior. Diodorus Siculus (*Bibliotheca Historica* V 15.2) identifies him as the son of Herakles' brother Iphikles; in a fit of madness Herakles betrothed his own first wife Megara to his nephew Iolaos. According to Zoroastrian sources (*Zadspram* 13), "The enumeration of the lineage of Zartosht is Zartosht, son of Pourushasp, son of Purtaraspo, son of Aurvadasp ..." (extending back to Gayomard), while his mother and grandmother were Dukdaub and Freno.

physical and baptismal vocabulary found in *Zostrianos* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, would not at all invite a philosophical reading.

3. The Transformation of Basic Sethian Doctrine

The earlier Sethian treatises present the Mother Barbelo as chief actor, the principal initiator and agent of enlightenment and salvation. She is ranked immediately after the supreme deity and is the source of the aeonic world. Most importantly, even though she is an androgynous being, a "Mother-Father" (μητροπάτωρ) and "Male Virgin," she is ultimately the Mother of those Gnostics to whom she descends, enlightens and receives back into the divine world. In this sense, she is the receptive principle *par excellence*, and no more fitting designation could be given her than to be identified as the "Mother" member of Plato's supreme triad of first principles, the Receptacle. Like Plato's Receptacle, her seed could only hope to live by being reintegrated within her, the Womb of the All.[30]

30. The stages by which this identification took place are scarcely recoverable, but if one were to hazard a guess, it might have included the following factors: 1) Barbelo, perhaps a *nomen barbarum* representing the Tetragrammaton or name of Yahweh, is consistently conceived as the first thought (πρόνοια, πρωτέννοια) of God, which would associate her with the transcendent forms insofar as these were considered to be God's thoughts, a conception typical of Middle Platonism. 2) Barbelo is more than once conceived as the Womb of the All, a notion rather close to Plato's concept of the Receptacle of becoming. 3) Barbelo is frequently called the merciful "Mother" or "Mother-Father." 4) Barbelo is said to have originated from the self-reflection of the father, much as *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NHC III,3 and V,1) conceives the origin of its second principle, the Autopator. While Plato and Old Academic thought conceived the Dyad (a mother figure) and the One (a father figure) as two coeval principles, neither derivable from the other, the advent of Neopythagorean schemes of the derivation of the number series in the first century BCE provokes Platonists under its influence to work out schemes in which the dyadic feminine principle is derived from the Monad, using the images of self-replication, self-retraction, self-extension, the sprouting of a seed, and so on. 5) Barbelo (explicitly in *Zostrianos*) serves as a receptacle or Womb for her spiritual progeny, and gives rise to the Self-begotten Son by conceiving him as a spark of the Father's light, quite as Plato represents the images of the Father's forms taking on substantial reality within the Receptacle; indeed, this son, identified with Christ and perhaps with Seth, is certainly an image of the Father. 6) In the Sethian Platonizing treatises, Barbelo begins to be conceived hypostatically as the divine Intellect, and is accordingly tripartitioned into a contemplated, contemplating and demiurgic mind, the lowest of which is identified with the self-begotten Son, a scheme rather close to that of Numenius. A corollary of this development is the

But beginning with *Zostrianos* (and perhaps the *Three Steles of Seth*) the Father, Mother, Child nomenclature for the supreme divine triad in the earlier Sethian treatises begins to fade, and the ontological position of the Mother begins to decline. The earlier Sethian treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John* portray the advent of salvation as conveyed by a series of temporally successive descents into this world by the Mother Barbelo in the form of various modalities, culminating in her gift of the baptismal rite of the Five Seals. However, starting with *Zostrianos*, the Platonizing Sethian treatises exhibit a more vertical, non-temporal, supra-historical scheme in which salvation is achieved, not through visitations of the Mother, but through a graded series of visionary ascents initiated by the Gnostic himself. In *Zostrianos*, the visionary ascends through the celestial realm to the intellectual level of the Barbelo Aeon. In *Allogenes* and perhaps the *Three Steles of Seth*, the ascent does not terminate in the Barbelo Aeon, but continues through the levels of the Triple Power, culminating in a non-knowing, mentally vacant revelatory encounter with the Unknowable One at the summit of all. In effect, the Aeon of Barbelo has now become only a stage on the path of ascent, no longer its goal or even its author. This shift is evidently the product of a deeper degree of involvement with a contemplative Platonism that takes its start in Plato's *Symposium* and leads directly to Plotinus. The inevitable result is an increased reliance upon self-performable techniques of enlightenment and a decreased reliance upon the salvific initiatives of the Mother Barbelo.

This development is to be explained by a shift in Sethian preoccupations away from the story of their primordial origins and the sacred history of divine initiatives and interventions by Barbelo and Seth on their behalf toward Platonic metaphysics, in which the feminine, maternal principle was associated—even since the time of Plato—with the deficiency of the Dyad. As we shall show in Chapter 9, particularly after the time of Philo, contemporary Platonism had a strong tendency, especially

introduction of a new triad, the Triple-Powered One, as the liaison between Barbelo and the Father. The result is Barbelo's relative demotion in the scale of being, which seems to result from an increasing tendency towards a philosophical monism involving the elevation of the Father as far as possible from subordinate beings, but still leaving him contemplatively accessible. Such a tendency is typical of the Neopythagoreanizing Platonists from Eudorus (see Chapter 9), and it should not be surprising that it would have its equivalent among those Sethian authors that over the course of time incorporated the insights of Middle Platonic metaphysicians.

in the cases of the second-century Platonists Plutarch and Moderatus, to demote the feminine principle to lower ontological levels: in positive form, to that of the rational aspect of the World Soul, and in negative form, to its irrational aspect which is regarded as the source of cosmic evil. This trend towards demotion worked its influence upon the Platonizing Sethian treatises, whose authors seem to have been closely allied with such Platonists, although not to the point of making the maternal principle the source of evil.

Both Philo and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, like the early Sethian treatises, locate a positive maternal principle at the second highest level of reality. Philo exalts Sophia nearly to the rank of God's consort and employs the terms Father, Mother and Son to designate God, Sophia, and the Logos, but unlike the earlier Sethian treatises, he fails to invoke any family triad or group of first principles by these names. But, as we will see in Chapter 9, shortly after the time of Philo, among second century Platonists Plutarch and Numenius, one begins to see metaphysical systems in which the feminine principle is regarded as the source of evil and irrationality in the universe, not only in the sublunar realm, but in the celestial realm as well.[31] Virtually the sole exceptions to this negative valorization of the feminine principle are the *Chaldaean Oracle*'s portrayal of Hecate and the early Sethian portrayal of Barbelo.[32]

In this regard, the Sethian valorization of the feminine principle can be taken as an index of the degree of the Platonic contribution to Sethian theology. The first traces of the so-called Barbeloite speculation visible in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* display the highest estimation of the feminine principle as the salvifically active member of the supreme Father, Mother, Child triad inspired by the *Timaeus*. Then, as Sethian thinkers became more heavily involved with the Platonic metaphysics of the second century in which the feminine principle was becoming increasingly associated with irrationality and evil, that positive estimation wanes. Indeed, in *Zostrianos* and the other Platonizing Sethian treatises, the Father, Mother, Child nomenclature becomes obsolete. It is not Barbelo's maternal characteristics as the merciful Mother and Womb of the All that are stressed; it is rather her status as the Knowledge or Intellect of the Invisible Spirit that is emphasized, an entity which Platonists traditionally treated in masculine terms as Intellect (νοῦς). She is no longer so much "Mother Barbelo" as she is the masculine Aeon of Barbelo.[33] It is ironic that, although the early Sethians seem to have had the greatest share in the first and second century rehabilitation of Plato's Father, Mother, Child triad, the increasing Sethian alliance with the very philosophers who likewise traced their doctrine back to Plato resulted in the demotion of that triad to the status of a mere preparatory level of visionary ascent along the way to a reve-

31. Plotinus' treatment of the feminine principle is even more complicated: as Life, a vital trace of the One, she is the source of Intellect. Yet as intelligible Matter and true unlimitedness, she is dangerous: had that aspect of her which has escaped the persuasion of being and truth not sunk down into the realm of images, her continued presence above would have threatened the destruction of the limiting principle itself.

32. The Sethians continue to present Barbelo as unequivocally good, and her lower double Sophia as tainted yet basically innocent; even though she mistakenly bore the ignorant demiurge, she continues to be "our sister Sophia." But despite this positive estimation of the Mother Barbelo, the Sethians also tend to demote her from her early status as the next highest principle after the Invisible Spirit, to a level subordinate to that of the interposed masculine triad of the Triple Powered One. The family triad has been split apart.

33. Another possible Platonic influence on the Gnostic systems is the multiplication of feminine beings located at various levels of reality, noticeable from Speusippus (discussed in Chapter 8) onward. The case of *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NHC III,3 & V,1), which displays no interest in family triads, preferring instead the masculine triad of Man, Son of Man and Son of the Son of Man, is most instructive here: all the female principles bear the name Sophia, but what distinguishes each of these figures is for the most part the epithet of the male consort with whom they are paired. That is, it is the number of male principles needing a consort that determines the number of female principles. However, Speusippus, the first Platonist to introduce multiple feminine principles, justified it on the grounds that, if there were only one Receptacle, only one kind of product would result, which is impossible, since the world contains many different kinds of things. That is, it is the number of different offspring that determines the number of female principles. In certain of the Sethian treatises, especially the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the feminine beings frequently seem to have been invented out of thin air, not from established Sethian tradition, in order to explain the origin of important male figures, such as the Child of the Child, Adam, Seth and Seth's seed. The same may be true for the Christianized Sethian treatises in general, where the center of interest is in the origin and work of the Self-begotten Son Christ, or of the divine Logos. Even though his mother Barbelo arranges his conception and sends him on his saving mission, or is herself conceived to be the actual savior appearing in the masculine guise of her son, it is still the son who is perceived to have the decisive soteriological contact with the gnostic devotee. And in the cases where Barbelo's soteriological efforts are presented as a threefold descent, it is only her third appearance in masculine form that is finally effective.

latory encounter with a supreme and genderless "One"; such is the doctrine of the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

Although the Platonizing Sethian treatises as a group have completely revised the traditional Sethian path to enlightenment away from the pattern of descending revealers who appear in a baptismal rite toward an ascent of the soul toward a vision of the supreme realities, *Zostrianos* continues to invoke the Sethian baptismal *dramatis personae* as both enablers and objects of transcendental vision, and the levels of ascent are said to be marked by baptisms, often in living water. And, although *Zostrianos* abandons the early Father, other, Child theogonical nomenclature for the supreme triad, it is replaced by the "derivational" Existence, Life, Blessedness triad latent within the Invisible Spirit at the highest level, and at a lower level, the older triad of Barbelo's attributes Prognosis, Aphtharsia, and Aionia Zoe (as in the *Apocryphon of John*) is replaced by a triad of ontological levels, Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes.

III. The Twilight and Eclipse of Gnostic Sethianism

It may be that the Sethians' gradual shift away from their original communal baptismal context—interpreted by means of a rich history of their primordial origins and salvation towards the more ethereal and individualistic practice of visionary ascent—contributed to the eventual decay and diffusion of those who identified with the Sethian traditions. Around 375 CE Epiphanius had difficulty recalling where he encountered Sethians; they are not to be found everywhere, but now only in Egypt and Palestine, although, fifty years before, they had spread as far as Greater Armenia (*Panarion* 39,1.1-2; 40.1). Epiphanius also says that, near the inauguration of the Sassanide era when Mani, who also rejected baptism, began his worldwide mission, the Archontic branch of Sethianism had likewise rejected baptism and the sacraments associated with the Church.

In any case, it is clear that after 200 CE, some Sethians as well as other Gnostics were engaged in discussion with Plotinus and the Neoplatonists. While initially welcomed in pagan Platonic circles, their insistence on the authority of revelation and on enumerating and praising their traditional divine beings with hymns, glossalalia, and other forms of ecstatic incantation began to irritate more sober Platonists such as

Plotinus, Porphyry and Amelius. Although the Platonists initially regarded the Sethians as friends, soon they too, like the heresiologists of the Church, began writing pointed and lengthy attacks upon them for distorting the teaching of Plato which they adapted to depict their own spiritual world and the path towards assimilation with it.

This rejection, coupled with the official sanction of Christianity under Constantine and the attendant pressure against the very paganism the Sethians had turned to, seems to have resulted in the gross fragmentation of whatever Sethian communities that may have survived into various derivative and other sectarian gnostic groups in Egypt, Palestine and Syria, where they may have no longer have been identified as Sethians, but perhaps as Archontics, Audians, Borborites, Phibionites, Stratiotici and others. The seed of Seth had been scattered indeed.

PART TWO
THE PLATONIC TRADITION

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BEGINNINGS OF PLATONIC SPECULATION ON FIRST PRINCIPLES

The purpose of this and the following two chapters is to trace out the development of Platonic speculation on first principles from Plato through the Platonic-Neopythagorean literature of the first three centuries of the common era, so as to form a background for understanding the nature of the speculation on first principles found in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, to be treated in Chapter 12. This treatment of doctrines concerning first principles will then be supplemented by a similar consideration of Platonic doctrines on the relation between body and soul and on the means of knowing God in Chapter 11. The present exposition of Platonic metaphysics falls into three segments: 1) Plato, the Old Academy, and the older Pythagoreans, treated in this chapter; Neopythagoreanism and Middle Platonism, treated in Chapter 9; and early Neoplatonism, treated in Chapter 10. These chapters are not intended as a complete or systematic exposition of these thinkers, and so will only touch on those works and concepts which have proved useful for understanding the metaphysics underlying the Sethian treatises.

I. Plato and the Old Academy

The Plato of the early and middle dialogues does not seem to be interested in cosmology as such, but rather with the question of what can be known. This concern with epistemology led Plato (427-347 BCE) increasingly to a consideration of the ultimate constituents of the universe. Like some of his predecessors, such as Empedocles (ca. 492-432 BCE), however, in varying ways he eventually took up the fundamental problem established by Parmenides (ca. 510-450 BCE) concerning the relationship between being—which as the only truly determinate and enduring reality is all that can be truly known—and the becoming and change characteristic of our daily experience, whose apparent reality is simply the consequence of erroneous human convention: on the one hand, only eternal, unchanging Being can exist and cannot come into being, grow or perish, especially since its inviolability is ensured by the bonds estab-

lished by Justice, Necessity and Destiny. On the other hand, this universe, inhabited by ignorant men, has come into being, will grow and perish. The two realms are absolutely incompatible and it is literally unthinkable that a confusion between them should exist. Most histories of Greek philosophy explain subsequent Presocratic philosophy—and that of Plato—as an attempt to answer Parmenides' discomfiting conundrum concerning these two realms.

A. Plato

Plato is a Parmenidean philosopher insofar as he too posits a realm of unchanging eternal and truly real things beyond this changing world of ours: the Ideas or Forms. But he is concerned to overcome the gap between these two realms in a way more satisfactory to him than that of his predecessors. Characterizing Parmenides' realm of static being as a transcendental realm of eternal Ideas which alone are truly knowable, Plato "saves the phenomena" of the ordinary realm of change and becoming by supposing that things in this world are not merely the product of erroneous convention, but have a kind of quasi-existence as reflections or imitations of or participants in the transcendental Ideas. A thing can only be known by apprehending its unchanging form, shape, or Idea as its ultimate reality; the appearance of the thing, its phenomenal image, is not an object of true knowledge, but only of mere opinion or belief.[1] Only the ideas of things have real being, although at points it seems that certain forms are more ultimate than others, or that there is a single ultimate form called the One, Unity, the Good, or ultimate Beauty. In *Republic* VI 509B, Plato even alludes to a supreme idea, the Good, that embraces all the other ideas:[2]

1. In the Academy, there is the closest relationship between the idea (ἰδέα) or essence of a thing and its form (εἶδος, figure, shape, contour, outline). According to P. MERLAN (*From Platonism to Neoplatonism* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 3rd ed. 1968], 43), the form of a thing is what keeps it apart from all other things; it is the boundary between it and its surroundings; it is a frame that remains stable (whether rigid or elastic), although the matter of the thing changes. It is the form by which each thing remains identical with itself and different from everything else. The form represents the element of being as opposed to the element of becoming. The form is also the equivalent of the presence of the idea in the thing; to the extent to which a thing has a form, it participates in its idea.

2. Καὶ τοῖς γιγνωσκομένοις τοίνυν μὴ μόνον τὸ γιγνώσκεσθαι φάναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ παρεῖναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑπ' ἐκείνου αὐτοῖς προσεῖναι, οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος.

> the objects of knowledge (the Ideas) not only receive from the presence of the Good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived from it, though the Good itself is not essence, but transcends even essence in dignity and power.

1. The Reconciliation of Being and Becoming: Demiurge and Soul

In the *Timaeus*, Plato uses a lengthy discourse by Timaeus, the Locrian statesman and philosopher, to explain how the phenomenal world has come to reflect these transcendent Ideas. According to G. Reydams-Schils, Timaeus begins his account (*Timaeus* 27D) with a number of axioms and derived principles.[3] First, reality has two aspects, eternal Being, approachable through reason and thinking, and continually changing Becoming, which is always coming to be and passing away (γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον), and is the object of irrational sensation (ἄλογος αἴσθησις) and opinion. Second, everything which comes to be must have a cause, which is to be found in the figure of an unquestionably good divine demiurge or craftsman. Third, whatever the demiurge creates after the paradigm of immutable Being is necessarily beautiful and best, while whatever derives from Becoming is not. Thus the cosmos is suspended between Being and Becoming: since it is visible, tangible, and has a body—thus an object of sense-perception—it belongs to the realm of Becoming, but since it is the most perfect of all things and derives from the best of causes, it must be the image of something else, namely an eternal paradigm that belongs to the realm of Being. Since the Becoming that characterizes the universe stands to Being as true opinion (πίστις) stands to truth, only a "likely account" (εἰκὼς μῦθος) of its generation is possible.

Timaeus goes on to claim that the universe as a whole is "alive, endowed with a soul and a mind," and that it "has come about through divine providence" (*Timaeus* 30B8-9); it is a unique perceptible whole that contains all living beings, modeled upon the intelligible Living

3. G. REYDAMS-SCHILS, *Demiurge and Providence: Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's* Timaeus (Monothéismes et Philosophie; Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 17-32. See also L. BRISSON, *Le même et l'autre dans la structure ontologique du Timée de Platon: Un commentaire systématique du Timée de Platon* (Sankt Augustin: Academie Verlag, 2nd rev. ed., 1994).

Being which contains all intelligibles, that is, the Platonic forms. As a sensible body endowed with the most perfect shape (a sphere) and motion (circular), the universe is a self-contained harmonious mixture of the four elements, and is therefore preserved from dissolution, since the providence of its creator also guarantees its preservation. The variety and multiplicity of the universe owes to a combination of its basic "stuff," the four fundamental elements (earth, air, fire and water), whose structure and measure provide its basic "shape."

The whole is animated by an orderly and harmonious Cosmic Soul that is also faithfully shaped by the demiurge according to the paradigm of the truly Living Being. This soul governs the Cosmic Body, pervading it from within, and enveloping it from the outside. The central points regarding the soul of the universe in Plato's account are: (1) The Demiurge wished that the world be the best possible and thus he decided that a world with intelligence was better than one without it. But since there is nothing with intelligence that is without soul, the Demiurge decreed that the world should have a soul (*Timaeus* 29D7-30C1). (2) The soul of the universe is located in the center of the body of the universe and extends throughout the body and wraps around outside it (*Timaeus* 34A8-B9). (3) Soul is prior to body in birth and excellence, and is its ruler (*Timaeus* 34B10-35A1). (4) The soul of the universe is composed of a mixture of indivisible Existence, Sameness, and Difference as well as divisible Existence, Sameness, and Difference (*Timaeus* 35A1-B3). (5) The soul is then divided or marked according to harmonic intervals (*Timaeus* 35B1-36B6). (6) The soul is then torn lengthwise into two strips that are connected to form two circles, an outer and an inner, the former comprising movement of Sameness, the latter movement of Difference (*Timaeus* 36B6-D7).

This cosmic soul is the result of the demiurge's reasonable and harmonious combination of three elements, Being, Sameness and Difference, each of which is apparently manifested in two modes, the "indivisible and ever constant," and "the divisible which comes to be in bodies" (*Timaeus* 34B-36D). Since the sensible world is an image of the Forms, it must resemble its model—thus Form is the cause of similarity—but as an image, it must also differ from it, the difference being guaranteed by the empirical multiplicity of its sensible instances. It is a balance between three ingredients, each of which has an indivisible, i.e., intelligible, and a divisible, i.e., somatic, aspect: one intermediate between indivisible and divisible Being, one intermediate between the indivisible and divisible Same and one intermediate between the indivisible and divisible Other. Being, Same, and Other are the fundamental ingredients of everything: the intelligible realm, the sensible world, and the Cosmic Soul intermediate between these. The Demiurge divides the World Soul's mixture of Same, Other and Being into parts according to mathematical proportions, splits it in two, and shapes each half into circles set at an angle to each other. The outer circle, called the circle of the Same, defines the motion of the fixed stars and has the intelligible realm as its object, while the inner circle of the Other is further divided into seven strips serving as orbits for the seven planets, and has true opinion about the sensible realm.[4]

Furthermore, the human body is a microcosm of the larger macrocosm. It is made from the same elements as the cosmic body, but is fabricated, not by the divine demiurge, but by lower gods who imitate the demiurge as best they can. Human bodies not only lack the eternity of the cosmic body, but, unlike the cosmos, must interact with an exterior realm, necessitating hands, feet and sense organs that engage in non-circular, linear motions and accelerations. Within the body's spherical head resides its own rational soul, which the demiurge takes from the remaining mixture used for the divine and immortal cosmic soul. It consists of the same ingredients as the World Soul with its own two circular movements corresponding to Same and Other, but in a less pure mixture.

When, however, this immortal part of the soul is attached to a human body by the lesser gods that the demiurge has provided for this purpose, its motions are upset and become chaotic. What is more, these lesser gods also append to the immortal soul two lower, mortal parts—spirit and appetite—yielding a tripartite soul with one immortal and two mortal parts. Unlike the immortal part of the soul, the mortal parts made by the lesser gods will sooner or later perish along with the body, while the immortal part must enter into a series of successive incarnations. The first incarnation is said to come about "out of necessity" (*Timaeus* 42A) and is decreed by fate (*Timaeus* 41E) to the accompaniment of blind mechanical processes among the four elements that oppose the rational and purposeful actions of the divine demiurge. But during an individ-

4. Of the Sethian treatises, only *Marsanes* offers a more or less direct implementation of this doctrine of the soul; see Chapter 14.

ual's lifespan, the rational part of the soul can learn to control the bad influences of its lower parts, and eventually return to its divine origin; since the circular motions of the Cosmic Soul are present in both the heavenly revolutions and in the immortal part of the human soul, humans can attune their souls to the Cosmic Soul by observing the heavenly revolutions through sight and thinking.[5]

2. Paternal Reason Persuades Maternal Necessity: the Receptacle

So far Timaeus has been discussing the works of reason (*Timaeus* 47E) in the universe. But this universe is not merely the product of reason, it is a combination of reason and necessity, the "erratic cause," which reason must persuade into orderliness insofar as possible. However, in 48E-52D Timaeus restarts his account in the form of a curiously self-contained, alternative creational myth, or perhaps counter-myth, that takes the reader back to the pre-cosmic phase of the universe at a point prior to the demiurge's creative involvement. It now turns out that the axiomatic factors of Being and Becoming must now be supplemented by a "third kind," an inert receptacle (ὑποδόχή / τὸ δεχόμενον), also called the wetnurse (τιθήνη), mother (μήτηρ), and nurse (τροφός) of all Becoming, as well as a space (χώρα) or place (τόπος) or seat (ἕδραν) in which all sensible things come to be and have their being, and out of which they pass away. While the demiurge explains how the cosmic image resembles its model, it is the receptacle that explains why it differs from its model.

At *Timaeus* 52D (cf. 30A), Timaeus makes another sudden shift, this time from a receptacle depicted and entirely inert and neutral, to one in chaotic motion, which already in the pre-cosmic phase has minimal features or traces of sensible things (containing moistness and fieryness and receiving the shapes of air and earth and certain visible characteristics) in complete disorder by which it is shaken in such a way as to separate out the four elements—as if from a pre-existent chaos. Thus when

5. Uniquely among created beings, the human soul is granted intelligence (νοῦς) as a divine *daimon* to direct him away from earth toward his kinship with heaven, where each soul has its own star from which it came and to which it will return. The cosmic intelligence of the demiurge is responsible for human souls, whose immortal part will be compounded of the same blend of ideal and instantiated being, sameness and difference as the world soul itself. Once brought to order by the world soul, the younger cosmic gods, also created by the world soul, mold the bodies of all living things.

the Demiurge starts his ordering activities he finds not merely an inert and empty receptacle, but a kind of Becoming already embedded in it.[6] The recalcitrance of these pre-cosmic elements is the work of Necessity, and limits the ability of the Demiurge's ordering activities. Thus Necessity and the Reason of the Demiurge that persuades Necessity into order are the two forces that shape the cosmos.

In any case, no matter whether the receptacle is inert and empty or already possessed of precosmic traces of the elements, it is always passive and receptive, never engaging in any intentional or proactive activity. The combinations of triangles which form the primary bodies are not formed by the Demiurge from the Receptacle, but rather projected onto it, as onto a kind of movie screen. The Receptacle is simply their χώρα or ἕδρα (*Timaeus* 52A). Upon these rudiments or traces of the four elements, he imposes the elemental shapes—the regular polyhedra (pyramid, octahedron, icosahedron, cube and, to insure the ultimate spheroidal shape of the ultimate result, a fifth, the dodecahedron) that correspond to the character of each of the four elements (fire, water, air, and earth) plus the novel fifth element aether—of which the cosmos will be constructed.

6. The following are the characteristics of the receptacle: it is distinguished from Being and Becoming as a third entity (48E4); it has the nature of a receptacle of all becoming (πάσης γενέσεως ὑποδοχήν, 49A5-6); it is like a nurse (τιθήνη); it must be called always the same (ταὐτον ἀεί, 50B6-7) it never departs from its own power or function (δύναμις, 50B7-8) it always receives the whole (τὰ πάντα, 50B8-9); it never in any way takes on a shape of any of the things entering it (μορφὴν οὐδεμίαν ποτὲ οὐδενὶ τῶν εἰσιόντων ὁμοίαν εἴληφεν, 50B8-C1); it is naturally there for everything as a mold (ἐκμαγεῖον, 50C2); it is changed and distorted by things entering it, and on their account appears differently at different times (κινούμενόν τε καὶ διασχηματιζόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν εἰσιόντων φαίνεται δὲ δι' ἐκεῖνα ἄλλοτε ἀλλοῖον, 50C2-4); it is that in which it becomes (τὸ δ' ἐν ᾧ γίγνεται, 50D1); it is a mother (μήτηρ, 50D); it is an invisible and shapeless form, all-receiving, partaking somehow most mysteriously in the intelligible (ἀνόρατον εἶδός τι καὶ ἄμορφον, πανδεχές, μεταλαμβάνον δὲ ἀπορώτατά πη τοῦ νοητοῦ, 51A7-B1); it is a kind of being which is spatial, eternal (γένος ὂν τὸ τῆς χώρας ἀεί) and indestructible, and provides a basis (ἕδραν) for all created things, and is apprehended imperceptibly by a sort of spurious reasoning (μετ' ἀναισθησίας ἁπτὸν λογισμῷ τινι νόθῳ, 52A8-B2; it existed before the heaven (οὐρανός, 52D4) and it is the nurse of generation (γενέσεως τιθήνη, 52D5). It is this receptacle that subsequent Platonists—but not Plato—will call a "substrate" or "matter" (ὕλη). It is at first said to be completely passive and neutral, not at all serving as the material *out of which* anything is made, but merely receiving the copies of the Forms that have already taken shape in the Paradigm.

All sensible objects are therefore images of the Forms, emerging, existing, and perishing without ever acquiring a stable identity within the volume of their "mother," the Receptacle and Nurse of becoming.[7] Like the main creation account, this one also stresses that phenomenal being is an image of the Forms. But unlike the rather more "patriarchal" main account, there is here no indication that phenomenal being is the result of an imposition of form upon a preexisting chaos by an active—though ungrudging and generous—male demiurge. In this more "matriarchal" account, there is no concept of the forceful imposition of form upon matter. Rather one finds an emphasis upon the ungrudging receptiveness and neutrality of the motherly Receptacle as the necessary condition for the world's coming into and continuing in being. Rather than images of imposition of form from above, one finds the image of persuasion, according to which the rational power of the demiurge persuades or elicits the cooperation of powers or forces that were previously indifferent or even hostile to one another. The emphasis lies on the realization that all phenomena are sprung from a common and all-encompassing—though to some extent recalcitrant—receptiveness to that persuasion.

There is also the implication that only the Forms and the Receptacle, as first principles, have any independent being of their own, while the images, the things that we see in the world, are only reflections in the prior being of the Receptacle. According to this account, Becoming is not an independent principle, but only a deficient imitation of Being. The images have no substantial reality; their being *is* that of the Receptacle.[8]

7. E. N. LEE, "On the Metaphysics of the Image in Plato's *Timaeus*," *The Monist* (1966), 341-368, and a private communication of April, 1985.

8. The images constitute the contents of the sensible world. While the Forms are the object of intellection and the images are objects of perception, the Receptacle is neither an intelligible nor a sensible object. It only partakes of the intelligible in a most puzzling way, and can be apprehended only by a kind of spurious reasoning. The Forms here involved are mainly those of the four elements, whose "qualities" comprise the content of the Receptacle. Prior to receiving the triangular geometrical shapes by which the demiurge imposes order upon them, these qualities or images enter and exist in the Receptacle in a state of disequilibrium, resulting by sheer necessity in a chaotic movement which agitates the Receptacle and by which the Receptacle in turn agitates them. Order is only produced when the demiurge gives the elemental qualities a distinct configuration by imposing shapes and numbers on them. In this way, Reason persuades Necessity insofar as possible, yet never completely, since there is always a residuum of a necessary indefiniteness or randomness that escapes the ordering process. The errant cause of the Receptacle is never completely mastered, and there are copies of the forms that never enter into the perfectly circular motion of Reason, but persist in an irrational rectilinear motion in the six directions.

In *Timaeus* 50D, Plato introduces the family triad of Form as Father, Receptacle as Mother, and phenomenon as Child (ἔκγονος) or "intermediate nature" (μεταξὺ φύσις).[9] But this in not an ordinary "procreative" family, for Plato makes it clear that this Father is absolutely aloof from all other realms: he never receives anything other than himself, nor ever himself goes out into any other. It is by the agency of forms and numbers alone that the Father marks out the images, and, in order to survive, the offspring must continue to exist "in" their mother.[10] That is, Plato offers two orders of being: a transcendent father who remains aloof from all else and who does not himself appear, and a dyad of mother and child which, though substantially separate from the father, is his phenomenal representation and the very expression of his transcendence. The father and mother are not a pair of beings who between them generate a third. Plato's metaphor of the family triad expresses the thesis that lower orders of being are not orders of being unto themselves, but in fact are the manifestation of the transcendent who is beyond being. This world is nothing other than the manifestation of the transcendent, the

9. According to Plutarch, *De anima Proc.* 1012E4-6, Zarathustra, Pythagoras' teacher, called the One the "Father," and the indefinite dyad the "Mother" of number.

10. In his early fifth century CE *Commentary on the Timaeus* (273, 277.13-278,7; 316, 313.2; 329, 323.18-20; 330, 324.19-23; 337,330.10-331,4; 344,336.5-6; 349,341.5-6), Calcidius interprets the relation between paradigm, receptacle and sensible form in such a way as to show that form does not combine directly with matter but produces a lower form as an image (*imago, simulacrum*) of the higher, appearing in the substrate to produce a sensible body: the Father (*pater*, i.e. the *ideae*) joins (*conectere*) sensible form to matter to provide these lower forms with substance and similarity (*similitudo*). These forms, enclosed by matter as in a womb, cannot exist alone and *per se* without support from the thing (the *mater*) that sustains them. In the process, matter is moved by the coming together of forms (*species* which are in turn images of the eternal and immortal *species*) entering into and informing it and moves those same forms in turn. The offspring (*proles*), as a generated form, stands between the truly existent and "that which is not among existent things" as an "existent in a sense" (*esse aliquatenus*; cf. Porphyry, *apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.135,1-9). Matter gives existence to the forms by providing a foundation (*stationem* = ἕδραν) for them and for "all that arises in its womb," and the forms in turn give existence to matter, because only informed matter can have any existence.

presence of its absence. As we will see, this notion forms the basis of the Sethian picture of the divine world.[11]

The *Timaeus* then goes on to present Timaeus' theories about human physiology and health, and then—as the product of inferior male souls degraded by transmigration into lower life-forms—the origin of women and the lower animals and the sexual reproduction associated with them. Thus the world is the instantiation of an ultimate model consulted by a supreme demiurge. On the question of whether there may yet be realities higher than these two, Plato says: "the principles which are prior to these God only knows, and he among men who is dear to God," (*Timaeus* 53D).[12]

3. First Principles

In the *Timaeus*, Plato did not venture to give any clearer account of first principles more supreme than the Forms and the Receptacle. Nevertheless, Plato's later dialogues sometimes hint at a certain dyadic principle which is opposed to yet coeval with the unitary principle of the *Republic* called the Good. Such a feminine principle seems to be offered in the Unlimited (ἄπειρον) of the *Philebus* (16C; which also has a feminine form, ἀπειρία). According to *Philebus* 24A-26D, This dyadic principle is usually conceived to be a sort of indefinite continuum extending in two directions, or perhaps even an indefinite oscillation in two directions between "great and small," "stronger and weaker," "more and less," and is responsible for change and indefiniteness, while that which provides moderation, measure and definiteness in this oscillation is called Limit. Philip Merlan has succinctly characterized the role of this

11. Note that in the *Apocryphon of John* BG 29,18-30,6 ("And Barbelo gazed intently into the Pure Light, and reverted to it and gave birth to a luminous spark of blessed light, <resembling the blessed Light>, but not equal to her in magnitude. This is the only-begotten Child, who appeared from the Father, the divine Autogenes"), there is no sexual intercourse between Barbelo and the Invisible Spirit, but she conceives merely by contemplating his light. The longer version in Codex II is much more aggressive and patriarchal, the Father using his spark to conceive the Autogenes Child.

12. τὰς δ' ἔτι τούτων ἀρχὰς ἄνωθεν θεὸς οἶδεν καὶ ἀνδρῶν ὃς ἂν ἐκείνῳ φίλος ᾖ.

two-opposite-principles doctrine in the Old Academy in terms of Aristotle's presentation and criticism of it:[13]

> In the middle of his criticisms of the Academic attempts to derive everything from two opposite principles, Aristotle explains the origin of this two-opposite-principles doctrine. Without the assumption of two opposite principles, the explanation of any diversity, any plurality, seemed impossible; all being was frozen into the one being of Parmenides. To account for diversity the Academics posited two opposite principles, being and something other-than-being, the interaction of which engendered plurality.

Although traces of Plato's theory of two ultimate principles can be found in his later dialogues, one may assume that it formed a topic of discussion in the Academy which he founded. At *Metaphysics* I 987b20 ff., Aristotle refers to Plato's basic principle opposed to the One as a dyad of the "great and small," performing the role of matter (ὕλη; Aristotle uses the phrase "indeterminate dyad," ἀόριστος δυάς, later in *Met.* XIII 1081a14 and XIV 1088a15). The only time Plato seems to have dealt explicitly with these two highest principles was in his notorious unwritten lecture "On the Good," the content of which is today derived from reports and discussions preserved by other authors.[14]

According to these reports, Plato's primal principles were the One and an opposing principle, the Indefinite Dyad, characterized as the many and few, the great and small, the more and less and the unequal. The Dyad is responsible for change and multiplicity in the realm of pure being, while the One causes unity, identity and permanence. The One acts by imposing limit (πέρας) on the unlimitedness (ἄπειρον) of the

13. P. MERLAN, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 3rd ed., 1968), 623.

14. Principally Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (esp. books I, XIII, and XIV), *Physics*, and *De Anima*, the commentaries upon these of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Simplicius, the records of this lecture by Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Heraclides, Theophrastus' *Metaphysics* and a long report in Sextus Empiricus' *Adversus Mathematicos* X.248-284. See the excellent summary, which I follow, by W. BURKERT, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Eng. trans. E. L. Minar, Jr.; Cambridge: Harvard, 1972), 15-28 (hereafter cited as *Pythagoreanism*); also cf. P. MERLAN, "Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 14-132, esp. 14-38, and the works of K. Gaiser, H. Cherniss and H. J. Krämer cited by Merlan and Burkert; also J. DILLON, *Middle Platonists, 80 B. C. to A. D. 220* (London/Ithaca, NY: Duckworth/Cornell University Press, 1977), 1-11.

Dyad, which latter is also considered to be the irrational aspect of the world soul and also the substrate of the sensible world, the receptacle of *Timaeus* 48E-52D. When limited by the One, the Dyad, serving as a sort of mold (ἐκμαγεῖον; Aristotle, *Met.* I.6 987b32-3, cf. *Timaeus* 50C), produces the number two, from which the rest of the natural numbers follow by a process of doubling and adding one. These numbers are the so-called ideal-numbers, not the numbers of ordinary calculation, which still tended to be regarded as objects in the ordinary world. They are the ideas of ordinary numbers; they share changelessness with the ideas and multiplicity with ordinary numbers, yet are ideal entities, uncombinable and incomparable with anything else, each one existing by itself and essentially different from any other; they stand to one another as prior and posterior, and have a natural order: ideal Twoness, Threeness, etc. After these mathematicals come geometrical entities.[15] Apparently to the One corresponds the undivided line (Aristotle, *Met.* XIII 1084b). To the Dyad, appearing as short and long, broad and narrow, and deep and shallow, correspond the ordinary line, plane and solid.[16] From these geometricals, Aristotle (*De anima* 404b), referring to the *Timaeus*, says that Plato conceived of the paradigm of the soul, the Animal-itself, as composed of the Idea of the One and the primary length and breadth. Mind is the monad, knowledge the dyad, opinion the plane and sensation is the number of the solid.

Building on the earlier work of F. M. Cornford and A. E. Taylor, K. M. Sayre[17] has argued that Plato's doctrine of the production of the ideal numbers as well as the other forms and the realm of sensible things from the two primal principles of the One and the Indefinite Dyad, is to

15. It seems that Plato conceived the world soul as the entity that mediates the transformation from the essentially mathematical ideas into the geometrical fundaments of extension, lines, surfaces and solids, so as to yield the three-dimensional realm of the physical world. Apparently the mathematicals, especially the first four numbers (the Tetraktys), provide the link between the absolute unity of the One and the three-dimensional physical world.

16. The report in Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. math.* X.278-282), however, says that to the One corresponds the point, which seems to be a notion, not of Plato, but of Speusippus (*apud* <Iamblichus>, *Theol. arith.* 84,10 de Falco) and Xenocrates (frg. 39 Heinze).

17. *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); cf. F. M. CORNFORD, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1937) and A. E. TAYLOR, *Plato: The Man and his Work* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1952).

be found clearly in his later published dialogues as well as in the reports of Aristotle and in the various digests of Plato's unwritten lecture "On the Good." The oral teaching is basically a development of the scheme found in Plato's *Philebus*, as well as in hypotheses II, III and VII of his *Parmenides*.

Sayre first notes that in *Metaphysics* I.6, Aristotle attributes the following theses to Plato: 1) that numbers come from the participation of the Great and the Small in Unity; 2) that sensible things are constituted by the Forms and the Great and the Small; and 3) that the Forms are composed of the Great and the Small and Unity. Aristotle implies also 4) that the Forms are numbers, and 5) that the Good is Unity or the One. Sayre then goes on to show that precisely these ideas, though utilizing slightly different terminology, are to be found in the later dialogues of Plato, mainly in the *Parmenides* and especially in the *Philebus*.

In hypothesis II of the *Parmenides* (142B-155E, esp. 144E-145A), Plato refutes the Eleatic thesis, common to Parmenides and Zeno, concerning the mutual exclusivity of unity, which alone truly exists, and plurality, whose existence is irrational, by demonstrating that anything that is one must be at least two, having both its unity and its being, and thus prepares the groundwork for showing that the Forms themselves, conceived as ideal numbers, are the product of Limit and the Unlimited (called the Unlimited Multitude, ἄπειρον πλῆθος, in hypotheses III and VII).[18] The *Parmenides* makes a distinction between two "Ones," a One-which-is in Hypothesis II (142B-155E), and in Hypothesis I (137C-142A), another absolutely pure, unique and unqualified "One," which cannot properly be said to "be" at all. Since any attribute such as "being" entails predication and thus a measure of plurality in its subject—i.e., the subject plus its predicate—the absolute unity of the subject is

18. "Therefore unity itself is parceled out by being, and is not only many but indefinitely numerous. Thus not only is a 'one which is' a plurality, but unity itself is distributed by being and is necessarily many. Further, since its parts are parts of a whole, the one, in respect of its wholeness, will be limited. For the parts are contained by the whole, and a container must be a limit. Therefore, a 'one which is' is both one and many, whole and parts, limited as well as infinitely multitudinous." Τὸ ἓν ἄρα αὐτὸ κεκερματισμένον ὑπὸ τῆς οὐσίας πολλά τε καὶ ἄπειρα τὸ πλῆθός ἐστιν. Οὐ μόνον ἄρα τὸ ὂν ἓν πολλά ἐστιν ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ἓν ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄντος διανενεμημένον πολλὰ ἀνάγκη εἶναι. Καὶ μὴν ὅτι γε ὅλου τὰ μόρια μόρια, πεπερασμένον ἂν εἴη κατὰ τὸ ὅλον τὸ ἕν· ἢ οὐ περιέχεται ὑπὸ τοῦ ὅλου τὰ μόρια· Ἀλλὰ μὴν τό γε περιέχον πέρας ἂν εἴη. Τὸ ἓν ἄρα ὂν ἕν τέ ἐστί που καὶ πολλά, καὶ ὅλον καὶ μόρια, καὶ πεπερασμένον καὶ ἄπειρον πλήθει.

thereby compromised. Oddly enough, the One of Hypothesis I, which admits of no relationships with other things, including being itself, is here described in terms more befitting Plato's principle of the Unlimited (ἄπειρον πλῆθος) introduced in Hypotheses II, III and VII than the "One-which-is" that he elsewhere conceives as the principle of Limit. Depending upon the absence or presence of a Unity or One-which-is acting as a Limit or principle of contrast and definition, this Unlimited Multitude can be variously understood: in hypothesis II (142B-155E), 1) in the absence of Unity, as an indefinite multitude with no distinct members, or 2) in the presence of Unity, as an indefinitely numerous set of uniquely distinct members (thus generating the series of integral numbers); in hypothesis III (157B-159A), as an indefiniteness arising from abstracting out the Unity (i.e. the unifying factor) of a whole with individual parts; and in hypothesis VII (164B-165D), in the absence of Unity, as the indefiniteness of one multitude with respect to another. While the One-which-is and the Unlimited Multitude lead directly to the Old Academic principles of the One and the Dyad, one can see how, at a much later time, various Gnostics and Neoplatonists might well adopt the absolutely unqualified One of hypothesis I, which has no determinate existence and is related to nothing else, as a sort of super-principle at the summit of their hierarchy of first principles, as that which is "beyond being" and utterly transcendent to any other imaginable entity.

In addition, Sayre also proposes an attractive mathematical explanation of the meaning of the Indefinite Dyad, or, as Aristotle calls it, the ontological principle of the Great and the Small. The key to understanding Plato's basic ontological theses as outlined and criticized by Aristotle lies in the mathematical theories contemporary with Plato, who, in the light of his increasing sympathies with Pythagoreanism during his later years, experimented with ontologies to which mathematics were basic. The intellectual basis enabling Plato to develop his theories about the interaction of the principle of Unity and the principle of the Great and the Small (or the indefinite Dyad) from which all else arises came to him from the mathematical researches of his contemporaries on the theory of proportions later put into rigorous form by Euclid.[19] Partly on the

19. In particular, Sayre refers to Definition 5 of Book V of Euclid's *Elements*: "Magnitudes are said to be in the same ratio, the first to the second and the third to the fourth, when, if any equimultiples whatever be taken of the first and the third, and any equimultiples whatever of the second and fourth, the former equimultiples

grounds of Plato's association with Pythagoreans (such as Archytas and Eurytos) who were known for their numerological speculations and partly on the grounds that Pappus' commentary on Bk. X, scholion 62 of Euclid's *Elements* credits Plato's associate Theaetetus with the discovery of irrational quantities that could be formed by arithmetical operations, Sayre conjectures that in Plato's time: 1) there existed arithmetical techniques for defining both rational and irrational numbers; 2) these techniques involved the concept of series of quantities that are consistently Great and Small in relation to the Limit they approach from above and below, and 3) that Plato was well aware of these techniques. Indeed, they are conspicuously reflected in the *Parmenides* and in the *Philebus*.[20]

In the *Philebus* (24E-25B), the ontological principle that Aristotle called the Great and Small seems to be identical with what Plato here calls the More and Less, or simply the Unlimited, which submits to number or measure or "whatever comes under the head of Limit" so as to produce individuals in the sense of numbers or measured entities. The Unlimited of the *Philebus* is none other than the Great and Small, which comprises all ranges of qualitative differences that are continuous in the sense of admitting more or less in degree at any point. Furthermore, Limit is comprised of all numbers and measures by which such continua can be subdivided into determinate elements. The resulting entities are what Plato had previously called the Forms, except that, unlike Plato's earlier view of the Forms, these Forms (or numbers) do not exist separately from sensible things, but exist derivatively by virtue of the participation of the Great and Small in Unity or by participation of the

alike exceed, are alike equal to, or alike fall short of, the latter equimultiples respectively taken in corresponding order." As applied to incommensurables [irrationals], Euclid's theory of proportions can be used to approximate the value of a magnitude incommensurable with it: the rational numbers m/n may be divided into two classes, 1) those for which m/n is less that the incommensurable ratio a/b of the magnitudes a and b and 2) those for which m/n is greater. For example, if a/b expresses the square root of 2 (= 1.41421...), the "Small" would designate an increasing series whose members are always smaller than a/b [rational or irrational]: 1/1, 14/10, 141/100, 1414/1000 etc., while the "Great" would designate a decreasing series whose members are always greater than a/b: 2/1, 15/10, 142/100, 1415/1000 etc. That is, if a/b is the "cut" or Limit, the "Small" are all less than a/b and the "Great" are all greater than a/b.

20. Especially *Parmenides* 140B-D, 151B-D, 156D-E and 157B-158C and *Philebus* 14C-18D, 23C-27B, 55E-58D and 64C-66B.

Unlimited in Limit. Forms are the numbers (not in the sense of arithmetical elements, but of determinate measures) by which the Great and Small is made definite and determinate. Moreover, just as these Forms are brought into being by the imposition of Unity on the Great and Small, so also the characteristics of sensible things are in turn brought into being by the Great and Small submitting to the Forms as measures. Existing separately from the sensibles, their ontological role is to serve as standards or paradigms by which sensible things can be characterized as what they are. Thus, the principle of the Unlimited acts in two phases, first in the generation of the forms, and again at a lower level in the generation of sensible things.

Sayre first conjectures that, under the influence of some Pythagoreans and contemporary Academic mathematicians, 1) when Plato spoke of the Great and Small, he meant a continuum of factors divided into two mutually exclusive sections by the imposition of Limit or Unity understood as the uniqueness of a point, i.e., a "cut," on the continuum of the Great and Small that takes on the identity of a particular number, and 2) that numbers (ἀριθμοί) are to be understood as measures (μέτρα).[21] These concepts can be applied not only to numbers, but also to geometrical magnitude (cf. Aristotle's remark in *Posterior Analytics* 75b4 that the magnitudes studied by geometry are numbers), time (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 220a: time is continuous [συνεχής] with the "now" as limit [πέρας], much like the arithmetic unit [μονάς ἀριθμοῦ]), and other such continua). The measures of all these are generated out of the Great and Small by the imposition of unique partitions or limits. The Great and the Small does not take on quantitative characteristics until subjected to certain limits of a mathematical sort.

Sayre's major hypothesis is that the ontological principle which Aristotle called the Great and Small was in fact explicitly described by Plato in the *Philebus* (24E7-8 and 25A-B), and there was designated as the More and Less, or simply as the Unlimited, which submits to Number or Measure or "whatever comes under the concept of Limit" so as to produce individual things (according to Sayre, in the *Philebus*, Numbers, Measures and Forms are all equivalent terms). While Aristotle said that,

21. Based on the observation that the Pythagoreans Philolaus and Eurytus (*apud Met.* 1092b8-13), as well as Euclid (Book VII, Definitions 3 and 13) and Aristotle (*Physics* 219b1-2, 220a24-25) spoke of numbers (ἀριθμοί) in terms of measures (μέτρα).

according to Plato, Numbers (in the sense of mathematical Forms, the ideal numbers) come from the participation of the Great and Small in Unity, the *Philebus* says that Numbers (understood as measures, including but not limited to arithmetical numbers) come from the Unlimited by participation in Limit.[22] Again, while Aristotle says that, according to Plato, sensible things are constituted by the Forms and the Great and Small, the *Philebus* says that the "third" or "mixed" class (23D1), which seems to include sensible things, comes from a combination of the Unlimited with Limit. Thus, the principle of the Great and the Small acts at two levels: at the highest level, it interacts with the principle of Unity (τὸ ἕν) to produce the mathematical Forms, and then at a lower level interacts with these derivative Forms to produce sensible things.[23] At the highest level, the Unlimited interacts with Limit to produce as offspring

22. As for the terms Limit and Unity, Sayre points out that, according to Aristotle, Plato conceived of Limit and Unity as equivalent or at least closely related (according to *Met.* X 1054a29-31 the equal belongs to Unity; according to XIV 1087b33-34 for Plato and the Academy, "Unity evidently means measure"). Aristotle characterizes as coming under Unity two of the factors that Plato in the *Philebus* characterizes as coming under Limit; in their involvement with equality and measure, Unity and Limit appear equivalent. In *Met.* IV 1004b32-34, Aristotle says of Plato that the contraries πέρας and ἄπειρον admitted by some thinkers (as does Plato in the *Philebus*) are reducible to τὸ ἕν and πλῆθος. In the *Philebus* (25A8-B1) itself, all things admitting "more and less" are to be put under the single "kind" of the Unlimited (εἰς τὸ τοῦ ἀπείρου γένος ὡς εἰς ἕν), while all things admitting "such things as equal, double, and all that relates as number to number or measure to measure" are to be reckoned as coming under Limit (at 23C12 and perhaps 23D2 Limit and Unlimited are called εἴδη). Finally, on the grounds of *Philebus* 16C9-10, "those things that are always said to exist are composed of one and many, having Limit and the Unlimited innately within themselves" (ἐξ' ἑνὸς μὲν καὶ πολλῶν ὄντων τῶν ἀεὶ λεγομένων εἶναι, πέρας δέ καὶ ἀπειρίαν ἐν αὐτοῖς σύμφθτον ἐχόντων), Sayre hypothesizes that the juxtaposition of the opposed terms ἑνός and πολλῶν with πέρας and ἀπειρίαν here amounts to an opposition of equivalents—in effect that Unity and Limit are one and the same ontological principle.

23. Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* I 988a7-14: Plato employed as the two fundamental causes "that of the essence and the material cause. The forms are the cause of the essence of other things, and the One is the cause of the essence of the forms, and he says that what is the underlying matter of which the forms are predicated in the case of sensible things and the One in the case of the forms is the Dyad or the Great and the Small." This is also the interpretation in Calcidius' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (272; 276,10-15): the highest forms combine with matter to produce the forms of the four elements, and secondly the forms of the four elements combine with matter to produce the four sensible bodies (*materiae sensibiles*), fiery, watery, earthy and airy (*igneae, aquatiles, terrenae et aereae*).

(ἔκγονος; cf. γένεσιν εἰς οὐσίαν ἐκ τῶν μετὰ τοῦ πέρατος ἀπειργασμένων μέτρων, *Philebus* 26D) the Forms, such as beauty, health, harmony and so on.[24] At a lower level, the Unlimited, as an unbounded continuum such as sound, interacts in turn with these derivative Forms to define sensible things, such as discrete musical pitches and phonemes. In this way, the otherwise indistinguishable stuff underlying our world becomes knowable.

By way of confirmation, Sayre observes that in the *Parmenides*, the derivations following hypotheses III and VII suggest that the Limit making sheer unlimited multiplicity (ἄπειρον πλῆθος) into numerically distinct entities is Unity itself. In brief, Unity is the principle by which Limit is imparted.[25]

In his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* 202b36, Simplicius (*In Phys.* 9.452,24-28) refers to Aristotle's reports on Plato's Lecture on the Good, and says that 1) Unity and the Indefinite Dyad are the principles of sensible things, that 2) the Indefinite Dyad is present in both the Forms and sensible things, and that 3) Plato called the Indefinite Dyad, i.e. the Great and Small, by the alternative title "Unlimited." Quoting from a work of Porphyry on the same lecture, he says (*In Phys.* 9.453,32-35) that Plato identified the Great and Small with the "Unlimited Nature." Later, with explicit reference to the *Philebus*, Simplicius (*In Phys.* 9.454,15-16) quotes Porphyry as saying that that "Unity and the Dyad therefore are the principles (στοιχεῖα) of numbers, the one limiting and productive of Form, and the other indefinite in excess and defect" (στοιχεῖα οὖν καὶ ἀριθμῶν τὸ ἓν καὶ ἡ δυάς, τὸ μὲν περαῖνον καὶ εἰδοποιοῦν, ἡ δὲ ἀόριστος καὶ ἐν ὑπεροχῇ καὶ ἐλλείψει). Put in other words, Unity is required to make a Form or definite number out of the Dyad which does not "stay put." Thus, 1) sensible things are constituted by Forms and the Great and Small; 2) Forms are composed of Unity and the Great and Small; and 3) Forms are numbers.[26]

The upshot of these passages, where Socrates says in *Philebus* 24E4 and 25A1 that the mark of the Unlimited (Nature) is "becoming more and less," must be that the Unlimited of the *Philebus* is none other than the Great and Small—that Porphyry too claimed to have found in the *Philebus*—as that which comprises all ranges of qualitative differences that are continuous in the sense of admitting more or less in degree at any point. Furthermore, Limit is comprised of all numbers and measures by which such continua can be subdivided into determinate elements. In this respect, Limit is what Plato elsewhere called the Forms, except that unlike Plato's earlier view of the Forms, these Forms (or numbers) do not exist separately from sensible things, but exist derivatively by virtue of the participation of the Great and Small in Unity or by participation of the Unlimited in Limit. Unity or Limit provides the uniqueness of the limits or "cuts" by which the numbers or Forms are uniquely identified. Forms are the numbers (not in the sense of arithmetical elements, but of determinate measures) by which the Great and Small is made definite and determinate. As Forms are brought into being by the imposition of Unity on the Great and Small submitting to the Forms as measures, so the characteristics of sensible things are brought into being by the Great and Small submitting to the Forms as measures. Existing separately from the sensibles, the ontological role of the Forms is to serve as standards or paradigms by which sensible things are characterizable as what they are.

By removing the condition of radical separation of the Forms from sensible objects that held sway throughout the middle dialogues up

24. Note that in the *Timaeus*, the ἔκγονος is the sensible *images* of the Forms.

25. In the *Parmenides*, one of the consequences of the third hypothesis is that the "nature other than the Forms" (τὴν ἑτέραν φύσιν τοῦ εἴδους, 158C6-7), considered simply in and by itself, is indefinitely multitudinous (ἄπειρον ... πλῆθει, 158C7-8). However, when each single part becomes a part, they all have Limit (πέρας, 158D1) with respect to both themselves and the whole. What provides Limit in the context of this hypothesis is the Unity assumed to exist at 157B5. Thus, as Parmenides points out, the "consequence of the things other than Unity ... is that from the combination of themselves with Unity something else comes to be in them, amounting to Limit with respect to each other" (τοῖς ἄλλοις δὴ τοῦ ἑνὸς συμβαίνει ἐκ μὲν τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ ἐξ' ἑαυτῶν κοινωνησάντων ... ἑτερόν τι γίγνεσθαι ἐν αὐτοῖς, ὁ δὴ πέρας παρέσχε πρός ἄλληλα, 158D3-6).

26. Simplicius (*In Phys.* 9.454,14-16) also reports that Porphyry said that, although the Dyad is indefinite, "it is limited by participating in Unity" (ὡρίσθη δὲ τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς μετοχῇ) and that, as an element of a number, Unity is "limiting and form-making" (περαῖνον καὶ εἰδοποιοῦν). In 9.455,7, Alexander is cited as saying that each number, insofar as limited, "participates in Unity" (τοῦ ἑνὸς μετοχῇ). Here one finds explicit evidence of how arithmetical numbers (and maybe numbers in the sense of measures) receive the limitation that separates them from the Great and Small: for numbers to participate in unity, says Porphyry, is for them to receive Limit; and for numbers to receive Limit, says Alexander, is for them to participate in Unity. Again, Simplicius (*In Phys.* 9.454,13-15) has Porphyry saying that the Dyad "in itself is indefinite, receiving limit by participating in Unity" (καθ' αὑτὴν μὲν ἀόριστος, ὡρίσθη δὲ τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς μετοχῇ), "for the dyad is limited by having a single Form" (ὥρισται γὰρ ἡ δυὰς καθ' ὅσον ἕν τι εἰδός ἐστι).

through the *Timaeus*, Plato provided an answer to the problem of participation. For changing and inconstant sensible things to participate in Forms is for Forms to serve as fixed standards of measure with reference to which these sensible things can be assigned definite characteristics, despite their indefiniteness and constant change.

4. Cosmogony

As we have seen, according to Plato's main creational myth in the *Timaeus*, (which with the possible exception of the passage 48E-52D makes no mention of the doctrine concerning the One and the Dyad), the all-good demiurge, regarded as Intelligence that desires to create as good a world as possible, perceives the Ideas within the Living Being, conceived as a supreme generic form containing all subordinate forms. Out of a preexisting chaos, namely the receptacle of becoming (53A-B) which contains the rudiments of the four (Empédoclean) elements (fire, earth, air and water), he produces the elemental shapes out of which the cosmos will be constructed. They are the regular polyhedra (pyramid, octahedron, icosahedron, cube and, to insure the ultimate spheroidal shape of the ultimate result, a fifth, the dodecahedron) corresponding to the character of each of the four popular elements (fire, water, air, and earth; the novel fifth solid to aether). In this way, the *Timaeus* imposes a rather more Pythagorean mathematical rationality on what might otherwise have been conceived as a chaotic Democritean necessity and randomness, thus insuring the ultimate reasonableness of the cosmos.

Furthermore, to ensure the mutual transformability of the elements, these polyhedra are said to have even more basic atomic constituents, the equilateral triangular surfaces of the first three and the right-angled, scalene and isosceles triangular surfaces of the others, which involve irrational quantities in their measurement. Yet even these triangular surfaces, guaranteeing boundaries within a three-dimensional world, are not the most ultimate constituents, which are known "only to God and to whomever of men is a friend of God" (*Timaeus* 53D), most likely referring to the remoter principles of the One (or Limit) and the Indefinite Dyad (the Great and Small, More and Less) or Unlimited, the latter of which Plato may have intend to refer to in his discussion of the Receptacle (*Timaeus* 48E-52D). In light of Sayre's explication of the interaction of Limit and the Unlimited, one can see how Plato could accommodate even irrational quantities into a rationally constructed cosmos through

the concepts of bounds, limits or cuts imposed upon otherwise chaotic and indistinguishable continua such as the Great and Small, or that appear within a plastic, maternal, spatial Receptacle characterized with a constant, irregular motion arising from an innate Necessity, into which copies of the forms take on a tangible, phenomenal character. In this way, reason ultimately prevails over a partly irrational necessity by "wise persuasion."

According to the *Philebus*, the principle of the Unlimited interacts with the principle of Unity (τὸ ἕν) or Limit at two levels. At the highest level, this interaction produces the Forms, which in turn interact with the Unlimited principle at the next level to produce the contents of the sensible realm. The cause of this interaction is said to be the divine Intelligence, playing much the same role as does the demiurge in the first part of the *Timaeus*. The *Philebus* differs from the *Timaeus* in two main respects: 1) In the *Timaeus*, only sensible things, images of the Forms, are generated in the Receptacle, while in the *Philebus*, the Forms too are generated from the interaction of the One and the Unlimited. 2) In the *Timaeus*, the Father is the forms, but in the *Philebus* these forms (numbers) are, just like sensibles, considered as offspring, and the role of the Father in the *Timaeus* is taken over in the *Philebus* by a "fourth kind," which is identified as an Intelligence presiding over the whole process by causing the interaction of Limit and the Unlimited to produce the "mixed" kind, namely their product, which is first the Forms, and secondly, sensible things as the product of the Forms and the Unlimited.

Thus, it seems that Plato had in mind a sort of procession from the two ultimate principles to ideal numbers, and thence to lines and plane and stereometrical figures, which he assumed were tantamount to perceptible entities, probably because their surfaces bind previously formless matter into solid corpuscular elements. As Plato says in the *Laws* X (894A),[27] coming into being occurs when

> a first principle, taking on increment (line) passes into its second transformation (plane) and from this to the next (solid), by three transformations having made perceptibility available to percipients [the meaning becomes clearer by substituting the term "dimension" for "transformation"].

27. Δῆλον ὡς ὁπόταν ἀρχή λαβοῦσα αὔξην εἰς τὴν δευτέραν ἕλθῃ μετάβασιν καὶ ἀπὸ ταύτης εἰς τὴν πλησίον, καὶ μέχρι τριῶν ἐλθοῦσα αἴσθησιν σχῇ τοῖς αἰσθανομένοις.

In the *Timaeus*, once the body of the cosmos has been rationally constructed, it must also be provided with a source of regular motion and life by enveloping the whole in an animated and intelligent image of it in the form of a world soul. Set into a perfectly circular motion, in which it can apprehend both the Forms and the sensibles, the cosmic soul lives, like an amphibian, in both realms. Simultaneously with this, the creation of the heavenly bodies enables the regularity of time, such that a periodic and measurable motion now arises to replace the precosmic indefinite motion of the Receptacle. In this way, Plato conceived the world soul as the entity that mediates the transformation from the mathematical ideas into the four fundaments of the extended geometricals and thence into the three-dimensional sensible realm of the created order. Apparently the mathematicals, especially the first four numbers (the Tetractys), provide the link between the absolute unity of the One and the three-dimensional physical world. Plato's immediate successors would make the identification between the world soul and mathematicals even more explicit: Xenocrates identified the soul with self-moving number, and Speusippus identified it with geometricals, (i.e. mathematicals distinguished by having form and extension): the soul is "the idea (i.e. form) of the all-extended."

In the foregoing discussion of the Receptacle, it was observed that Plato offered two orders of being: a transcendent father who remains aloof from all else and who does not manifest himself in the phenomenal realm, and a dyad of mother and child which, though substantially separate from the father, are his phenomenal representation and the very expression of his transcendence. That is, the dyad is not a pair of primal principles, father and mother, but is a dyad of mother and child who together constitute and represent the being and phenomena of the world. Although they function similarly, Plato does not seem to have explicitly worked out the relationship between the indefinite dyad and the dyad of mother and offspring. This remained for his followers. The dyad of *Timaeus* 48E-52D is, like the dyad of the unwritten doctrines described above, responsible for change and becoming, and is the source of multiplicity, but is neither evil nor non-being. As we shall see, the same position was also adopted by Plato's nephew Speusippus, although Xenocrates, Speusippus' successor in the leadership of the Academy, considerably modified it by his assertion that the Dyad was not only the ultimate source of evil, but was in fact itself evil.

It should also be noted that, although Plato did develop the doctrine of two opposite supreme principles, he does not seem to have produced any explicit description of the progressive unfolding of the world from their interaction as he did in the case of his account of the activity of the demiurge in the *Timaeus*. Again, the fuller exposition of the derivation of the world from the two opposite principles remained for his successors. Philip Merlan summarizes the problem concerning the transition between the so-called ideal and the so-called real at the end of Plato's career as follows:[28]

> The answer to the [question "in what way are ideas causes of sensibles"] seems to terminate in the assumption that the ideas are causes *only* by being originals which are mirrored in some kind of mirror. The nature of the mirror itself remains largely undisclosed. On the whole we are left with the impression that the ideas are in no way responsible for the existence of the mirror and that their own existence is in no way dependent on the mirror; furthermore, that ideas and the mirror together are *conditiones sine quibus non* for the existence of sensibles, while it is at least controversial whether they are also *conditiones per quas* of this existence. Once they have come into existence, sensibles may also be said to imitate ideas; but this kind of causality of ideas is irrelevant in the present context. Now, if we keep the term "mirror," we shall have to say that according to Aristotle this mirror is present already in the first sphere of being (ideas), so that there is something like a continuous transition from the ideas to the sensibles. The same assumption underlay the systems of Speusippus and Xenocrates, though instead of the identity of the mirror and the different spheres of being the concept of analogy or similarity may appear.

To connect this statement clearly with what has been presented above concerning Plato's system, it should be understood that the term "mirror" refers to the receptacle (space, the nurse and mother of becoming of *Timaeus* 48E-52D) in which sensible phenomena are manifested and have their being, apprehensible, as Plato says, with "a kind of bastard reasoning."

B. The Old Academy

The Old Academy seems to have adopted Plato's doctrine in a form in which the presiding Intelligence was identified with the One or Limit, thus restricting the ultimate principles to a supreme pair, the One and the

28. P. MERLAN, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 3rd rev. ed., 1968), 227.

Unlimited or Indefinite Dyad, whose function was identical with that of the Limit and the Unlimited or Great and Small of the *Philebus*. These complementary principles of Limit and the Unlimited are necessary to the existence of any ordered system. In the transcendent world, the Dyad submits perfectly to the principle of order and form and thus is merely the cause of the multiplicity necessary to any world. But in the phenomenal, perceptible world, especially at levels below the moon, this ordering becomes less complete. At the lowest ontological levels, the unordered residue of the indefinite principle constitutes an excess of unmastered disorder which becomes viewed as the source of evil.

1. Aristotle on Matter and the Dyad

According to Aristotle (*Physics* 192a14-16), matter is not the principle of evil or the source of disorder. Privation or lack of form is a real force—both positive and negative—in the physical world, although simply *as* privation it may be said not to exist actually. Privation is the contrary of form, and change always proceeds from privation to form or vice versa. Although privation always occurs in some matter, it is not identical with matter, but can be distinguished from it, for privation is strictly non-being, whereas matter under the influence of form is positive potentiality for coming-to-be, but in its own nature may rather be described as neutral, that is, it is a potentiality for opposites. For Aristotle, although form is contrasted with privation rather than matter with form, the valorization of matter, which he equates with the Indefinite Dyad, ranges across the scale from positive potentiality and neutrality to indeterminacy and resistance to form. In its own nature as primary matter, it is a neutral capacity for both of its opposites, form and privation; it is an "incorporeal" principle that is a capacity for body rather than simply being body itself. As we will see, later Neopythagoreans such as Moderatus adopted matter—characterized by Aristotelian privation of form—as the source of corruptibility, worse than coming-to-be itself.[29]

29. See K. CORRIGAN, "Positive and Negative Matter in Later Platonism: The Uncovering of Plotinus' dialogue with the Gnostics," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 21-24 and IDEM, *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias* (Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Supplementa 3; Leuven: Éditions Peeters, 1996).

Aristotle sought to replace Plato's duality of two ultimate principles, the One and the Indefinite Dyad (the Unlimited, the Great and Small) with the pair Act and Potency (δύναμις/ἐνέργεια) on the grounds that opposites cannot act on opposites in the way that Plato claimed the One to act upon and limit the Indefinite Dyad. Therefore the concept of the Indefinite Dyad must be replaced by the concept of something underlying the interaction of opposites, a substrate. This substrate, matter, is potentially that which it can become actually, either something or its opposite. Thus matter is never sheer negation or indefiniteness, but always determined negation or indefiniteness. Indefiniteness can only be an accidental attribute of matter.

2. Speusippus

Certain of Plato's notions, particularly those of the unwritten doctrines, were adopted with some basic modifications by his successors as leaders of the Old Academy. His nephew Speusippus eliminated Plato's Ideas in favor of the mathematicals, and his successor Xenocrates identified the mathematicals completely with the Ideas. Separately from mathematical numbers, Plato had postulated the transcendental existence of ideal numbers, each existing by itself, each one essentially different from any other, uncombinable and incomparable with and underivable from anything else, standing to one another as prior and posterior, and having a natural order: ideal Twoness, Threeness, etc.[30] It seems that both Speusippus and Xenocrates, not to mention Aristotle, conceived numbers as aggregations of abstract units or monads, the numbers with which one can count, add, multiply, etc. Unlike Aristotle, for whom numbers exist immanently in sensible things, Speusippus granted numbers an existence separate from sensible things, outside of time and place. They are the first entities and may be known directly, unlike geometrical magnitudes, which are known derivatively from numbers (the point is like one, the line like two, the plane like three and the solid like four), and thus come second. Third comes the soul, which Speusippus is said to have called "the idea (i.e. form) of the all-extended," which seems to place it as a unitary principle of motion intermediately

30. Cf. *Phaedo* 101B-C; *Philebus* 56D-57A; *Republic* VII 525C-526C; Aristotle, *Met.* XIII 1080a17. In *Met.* XIII 1081b11-14 Aristotle says that Plato also posited the existence of mathematical numbers as intermediate between the ideal numbers and sensible things.

between the immutable mathematicals and the sensible realm which comes to be and passes away.

According to various accounts, probably all deriving from his work *On Pythagorean Numbers*,[31] Speusippus appears to have insisted upon five levels of being, each with its own different set of first principles: the One, number, geometricals, soul, and the physical world.[32] Like Plato, he posited two highest principles of mathematical numbers, the One (τὸ ἕν, ἡ μονάς), and Multiplicity (τὸ πλῆθος, τὰ πόλλα), a principle of division and magnitude. Goodness is said to be inapplicable to the One, since it is eternal and not the product of natural development. It is difficult to tell whether the One, as principle (ἀρχή) of the mathematical numbers which define the highest sphere of being, is merely the first of these numbers (the number One) or whether it is in some sense a principle beyond being even as it is beyond goodness. Aristotle (*Met.* XIII 1083a24-25) says Speusippus posited a certain One prior to the one in numbers. The principle of Multiplicity may refer either to the multiple character of each number beyond one, or, as Aristotle seems to think, it may refer to a generative principle of some sort contrary to the One, in which the One imposes limit and quality on Multiplicity. While Speusippus seems to favor the image of the imposition of form on matter, it seems clear that his thought is much influenced by the imagery of *Timaeus* 48E-52D, since he does indeed identify the second of his ultimate principles, Multiplicity, as the Receptacle. According to the Speusippian passage isolated by P. Merlan from Iamblichus' *De communi mathematica scientia* (15,5-18,12 Festa), one may see how Speusippus posited a derivation of the world from the two ultimate principles of the One and Multiplicity (probably his term for Plato's Indefinite Dyad), leading to the successive generation of the realms of mathematicals, geometricals, the world soul (third level) and the physical world (fourth and fifth level), each arising out of their own appropriate Receptacle or material principle.[33]

31. Aristotle (*Met.* VII 1028b), the final (Latin) portion of Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides* (*Procli Comm. in Parm. interp. G. de Moerbeke*, 38,31-41,10 Klibansky, Labowsky, Anscombe), <Iamblichus> *Theol. arith.* (82,10-85,23 de Falco), and perhaps Iamblichus, *De comm. math.* (15,5-18,12 Festa).

32. Aristotle, *Met.* VII 1028b18-24; XII 1075b37-1076a4.

33. <Speusippus> *apud* Iamblichus, *De comm. math. sci.* 15,5-18,12 [Festa]. See P. MERLAN, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 3rd rev. ed., 1968), 96-140. L. TARÁN, *Speusippus of Athens: A Critical Study with a Collection of the Related Texts and Commentary* (Philosophia antiqua 39. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 86-107, has seriously questioned Merlan's attribution of this passage to Speusippus, claiming it stems rather from an anonymous pre-Iamblichean author who culled Aristotle's *Metaphysics* for doctrines about principles, mathematicals, being, goodness, beauty, and evil to support his own philosophical beliefs. Speusippus himself derived neither numbers, which were collections of eternally existing monads, nor magnitudes from first principles. Nevertheless, as J. DILLON argues, the passage certainly presents a cosmology highly compatible with what can be gathered from Aristotle's own very allusive accounts of Speusippus' doctrine: as Aristotle makes clear elsewhere, Speusippus certainly held the One and Multiplicity as the principles of mathematicals and that there was a plurality of material principles ("Speusippus and Iamblichus," *Phronesis* XXIX [1984], 325-332, reprinted in *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* [Hampshire, GB: Variorum, 1990]).

> Of mathematical numbers one must posit two primary and highest principles, the One—which ought not even to be called being, because of its simplicity and status as principle of all that is, a principle not yet existing in the same way as those things of which it is the principle—and another principle, that of Multiplicity, which by itself furnishes discontinuity and, to describe its nature as fittingly as possible, we would declare to be like a completely moist and pliable Matter (ὑγρᾷ τινι παντάπασι καὶ εὐπλαδεῖ ὕλῃ). From these, the One and the principle of Multiplicity, results the primary class [i.e. numbers], since numbers are constituted from both of these principles by virtue of a certain persuasive necessity (*Timaeus* 48A). And it is fitting that this nature [Multiplicity] be responsible for a discrete procession of the numbers, and for ascribing to each number all discontinuity and magnitude as is universally admitted, and that the limiting principle, even the One, as the undifferentiated and indivisible confirming principle, impose the quality of each of the numbers [i.e. Multiplicity provides infinite increase, discreteness and magnitude, while the One imposes limit and quality]. It is equally not fitting to attribute evil or ugliness to such a thing by virtue of being by itself the cause of magnitude and division, and also of increase; not even in the case of other things are we accustomed to attribute such a thing to an evil lot; sometimes when the great is mixed with a certain quality we would rightly say that is the cause of something magnificent and generous, so that it would be far from appropriate to call it (Multiplicity) evil.
>
> Now if indeed one happens to praise the nature of the One on account of its self-sufficiency and its being the cause of certain beautiful aspects of numbers, how illogical it would be to say that something [the cause of Multiplicity] naturally receptive of such a thing [the One] is evil or ugly, for it still would not at all follow that it be responsible for beauty or ugliness, since that which is receptive of something praiseworthy must itself be considered praiseworthy. Let us therefore conceive it [the cause of Multi-

plicity] as a (primal) principle. Nor ought The One to be called either beautiful or good, since it is beyond even the beautiful and good. As nature proceeds further from the things at the origin [cf. Arist. *Met.* 1091a35], there first appears Beauty, and second, at an even further distance from the things containing the elements, the Good [i.e. beauty appears in numbers and the good at the third rank of entities].

Moreover, the prime Receptacle and magnitude, or whatever one ought to call it, copies the form of the numbers, on the one hand probably indefinite in quantity, and on the other hand somehow definite in form by receiving the contribution of the One. Therefore positing a single, unlimited Matter and Receptacle for everything, it would be unreasonable not to expect that, since the form of the One imposing itself on it is everywhere homogeneous, exactly the same things and classes of thing would result. As a result, all classes of thing would be numbers, since we would be unable to posit any cause of differentiation according to which at one stage the nature of numbers was produced, and then [at another] that of lines, planes and solids, instead of always the same class, since they would have to arise from the same principles combining in the same way [i.e. there must exist more than one receptacle or material principle or everything would be number; cf. Aristotle, *Met.* II 1001b19-25].

But if one supposes the first cause of all multiplicity and magnitude is single, yet provided with many differences on account of which it gives rise to many different kinds of entity throughout all of nature—even if the One remained similar to itself throughout and did not ever show clearly its nature on account of the density of matter, as would a single shape in randomly scattered pieces of wood—even if these things would not logically apply to it (the One), one would be equally wrong to divide the primal (material) element into so many differences, especially having gone through all these examples; for an element is everywhere the simplest thing.... For this reason I posit lines and solids and surfaces of spaces. First, therefore, is the material of numbers, second that of lines and planes and solid figures. And likewise of the other mathematicals, whichever and of whatever sort reason might find, suitable receptacles must be presupposed.

So let this hold for us: the elements from which numbers derive are not yet either beautiful or good, but from the union of the One and the cause of Multiplicity, Matter, there arises number, and among these primal things there (first) appears being and beauty. Next in order, from the elements of lines there appears the geometrical essence, in which there is likewise being and beauty, in which there is nothing ugly or evil. At the furthest levels, the fourth and fifth [perhaps the third being the world soul, the fourth, the sensible world, and the fifth, perhaps some lowest inert sphere], which are assembled from the final elements, evil arises, not proactively, but by default and a failure to master certain aspects of the natural realm

[cf. Aristotle, *Met.* XIII 1078a31-b6]. (Iamblichus, *De communi mathematica scientia* 15,5-18,12 Festa)

From the union of the One and the cause of Multiplicity (Matter) arises Number, beginning with a lower one called a monad, and it is in this realm that Beauty first appears. In succession there arises out of the point (corresponding to the monad in the realm of numbers) the geometrical realm (1 is the point, 2 the line, 3 the triangle, and 4 the pyramid) in which there is both Being and Beauty. Then comes the World Soul, "the Idea of the everywhere extended" and first principle of motion, in which there is virtue and vice. Finally the physical realm arises from the projection of soul upon the lowest level of matter.

Of course, since both numbers and geometricals are eternal and immutable, such generation is not temporal evolution, but merely an intelligible or logical relation of causal priority and posteriority. At each of the five levels of being, a masculine principle of unity interacts with a feminine principle of plurality. The first principle of number would then act upon the matter (the original Multiplicity as modified by the action of the One) corresponding to it. This union in turn produces geometricals (lines, plane figures, and solids). This third level of entity produces, out of the first principle of geometricals (the point) and its corresponding Matter (an unnamed principle of plurality among magnitudes, perhaps something like dimensionality) the Soul, which sets the geometrical level in motion, and hence acquires the definition "the Idea of the omnidimensionally extended" (Fr. 40 Lang). The process is repeated again at an (unidentified) fourth and fifth level presumably to produce physical entities, animate and inanimate respectively. The material principle, therefore, has five different manifestations at each level of being; Speusippus apparently connected primal Multiplicity (the Unlimited, or Great-and Small of Plato's oral teaching) with the Receptacle of the *Timaeus*, (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 209b35 ff.), by postulating the same (female) creative principle manifesting itself at a series of levels, altering its nature as a receptacle according to the level of the formative agent that acts upon it. In this way, lower realms of being contain first principles of both unity and diversity which sustain an analogy with the first principles of the next higher realm. It seems that each unitary principle combines or interacts with a principle of plurality on its own level to produce its members. This replication of principles of unity and di-

versity on successively lower levels seems to be original to Speusippus.[34]

3. *Xenocrates*

Xenocrates, probably acquainted with Plato on the one hand and Zeno and Epicurus on the other, succeeded Speusippus to the headship of the Academy in 339 BCE. According to Aëtius (1, 7, 30 = frg. 15 Heinze *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I, 1.29b,44-48 p. 46 Wachsmuth), he held as first principles a first and second God: "the monad and dyad are both gods, the first one being male plays the role of father, ruling in heaven;

34. Whether or not the *De communi mathematica scientia* passage is authentic, Speusippus—as Aristotle confirms—posited a series of material principles responsible for the appearance of multiplicity at each successively lower realm, beginning at the intelligible realm of the mathematicals, then at the level of the geometricals, and appearing finally in the lowest two realms, where the persuasive necessity characterizing the upper levels begins increasingly to master the lower levels, a notion bordering on Plotinus' notion of the gradual privation of the power of the good at each successively lower level. This tendency to regard evil not as something existing positively, but rather as something negative and a failure is also to be found in Aristotle (*Phys.* 199a30-b7), where he explains that evil results when the eidetic nature does not fully master the hyletic nature; monsters (including women!) result from a dissimilarity to their male parent. Merlan (*From Platonism to Neoplatonism* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 3rd rev. ed., 1968], 123-125) has pointed out that all Platonists strive to explain the origin of plurality and all tend to regard it as an evil development. While Speusippus and presumably Plato attributed it to the interaction of two opposed principles, Plotinus preferred to explain plurality as due either to an involuntary and necessary overflowing of the One, or as due to a kind of voluntary, even audacious (τόλμα, ἀπόστασις) falling away (πέσειν, πτῶμα) of a lower from a higher principle. On a number of points Speusippus proves to have moved toward doctrines characteristic of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists. His characterization of the One as "not even being" strongly suggests the notion of a One which is beyond being. On analogy with the *De communi mathematica scientia* passage's claim that the One is above being and not evil, Merlan (disputed by Tarán, *Speusippus of Athens*, *op. cit.*, *supra*, 96, n. 433) suggests that the particular originality of Speusippus seems to consist in his having described the principle of multitude, said not to be evil, as likewise above—although ultimately responsible for—non-being (just as the One is beyond being). Sharing with the One the condition of being neither good nor evil, it is presumably beyond value as well. Of course, there is also much in Speusippus' thought that is traditionally Old Academic: the principle of Multiplicity is characterized by Speusippus as a receptacle (ὑποδοχή) and as receptive to the One, after the doctrine of *Timaeus* 48E-52D, and also as Matter (ὕλη), which is not Plato's term, but rather that of Aristotle. That Multiplicity also contributes indefiniteness in quantity seems also Platonic, from the doctrine of Plato's "oral teaching" on the Good.

he calls it Zeus, the odd, and mind, who for him is the first god. The other one, female, as a mother to the gods, rules over the realm beneath heaven; she in his opinion is the soul of the universe." But surely the cosmic soul cannot be a first principle, for Aëtius (1, 3, 23 = frg. 28 Heinze *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I, 10.12, 20-21 p. 123 Wachsmuth) also reports that he said "the whole consists of the one and of the everflowing, calling matter everflowing because it is the principle of plurality." According to Plutarch (*De anima procreatione in Timaeo* 1012D-E), Xenocrates interprets the construction of the cosmic soul in *Timaeus* 35A1-5 as a combination of the indivisible and divisible essences (ἀμέριστος οὐσία = τὸ ἕν and μεριστὴ οὐσία = τὸ πλῆθος = ἀόριστος δυάς), which gives rise to the Dyad as the first of the numbers. Numbers are then derived from the imposition of Limit on the Dyad through the agency of the One. Aetius says this Dyad is the World Soul, but as Dillon[35] suggests, he must be conflating entities somehow, since for Xenocrates the Indefinite Dyad is an evil and disorderly (ἀείναος, "everflowing") principle, which the World Soul is not. Rather this Dyad, as the first of the numbers, is stable (ἀκίνητος); only when it is combined with the principles Sameness (ταὐτόν) and Difference (τὸ ἕτερον understood as a principle of movement) does it become a cosmic soul capable of Rest and Movement, a self-moving number (ψυχῆς τὴν οὐσίαν ἀριθμὸν αὐτὸν ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ κινούμενον, *De anima proc.* 1012D3-4). Thus one might assume that Xenocrates posited a Monad and Indefinite Dyad from which the World Soul, as Definite Dyad, arises. The World Soul is located at the Moon, below which is the realm of Hades, the abode of daemons.

The realm of numbers exists separately from sensibles; all the ideas are comprised of numbers (one may call them "idea-numbers"), understood to be mathematical numbers, composites of units capable of undergoing mathematical operations.[36] It is possible that Xenocrates thought these numbers or ideas to be contained in the divine Intellect, or at least in a supracelestial place (frg. 5 Heinze). This would make Xenocrates the first to propose a conceptualist theory of ideas: rather than Plato's and Speusippus' realist view of the ideas as objects of

35. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, 26.

36. Aristotle, *Met.* VII 1028b,24-27; XIII 1080b23-30; XIII 1083b2; XIII 1086a5-11; XIII 1086b1-8; Themistius, *In Aristotelis de anima paraphrasis* 11,20-27.

thought external to the thinking mind, Xenocrates seems to place the ideas, as both the content of the supreme monadic Mind and the objects of its thought, within that Mind. While the ideal numbers, completely assimilated to the Ideas, were associated with the first God as Intellect and Monad, the numbers of ordinary calculation, as well as the elements of geometry, were associated with the World Soul. Aristotle (*Met.* XIII 1085a) may have Xenocrates in mind when he says that some followers of Plato derive lines, planes and solids from numbers conceived as species of the Great and Small: lines from the Long and Short, planes from the Broad and Narrow, and solids from the Deep and Shallow. Dillon suggests that each successive geometrical principle was taken on by the fluidity of the Indefinite Dyad to produce the principle of the next level,[37] so at least at a level below that of the ultimate principles, Xenocrates seems to show some agreement with Speusippus. In any case, Xenocrates seems to have effected a synthesis between Plato, for whom the highest realities are Forms, and Speusippus, for whom the highest realities were numbers and mathematical magnitudes; only after these comes the cosmic soul.

As Mind, the Monad is rational and intelligible, while the cosmic soul exercises merely opinion and perception, "an irrational entity requiring informing and intelligizing at the hand of the Monad."[38] Where might Xenocrates have derived this association of the cosmic soul with duality and irrationality? Although in *Laws* X (896D-904B) Plato hints at the existence of a separate evil or irrational cosmic soul, he nowhere explicitly portrays a division of the cosmic soul into rational and irrational components. But in the *Timaeus* he clearly portrays its division into a higher and a lower level, that of the Same and that of the Other. They are distinguished respectively by the sphere of the ever uniform versus the sphere of becoming, and the sphere of Mind and knowledge versus that of opinion and belief (*Timaeus* 37A-C). Citing Philo's *de Decalogo* 103, M. Baltes[39] has called attention to the striking resemblance

37. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 28.

38. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 26.

39. Philo, *de Decalogo* 103: "The heaven has been framed out of the indivisible nature and the divisible (*Tim.* 35A); to the indivisible has been allotted the primal, highest and undeviating revolution presided over by the monad; to the divisible, a [revolution] secondary in power and rank, subordinated to the hebdomad, which, having been divided by a sixfold partition, has produced the seven so-called planets." See M. Baltes, "Zur Theologie des Xenokrates," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. R. Van den Broek *et al.* (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 112; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 52-54.

40. An even (1,2,4,8) and an odd (1,3,9,27), comprising respectively "the movement of the other" and "the movement of the same" in *Timaeus* 35B4-C2. See the application of these notions in *Marsanes*, discussed in Chapter 14.

41. Thus the hebdomad, which Philo calls (*Dec.* 102), "the virgin among the numbers, the essentially motherless (cf. *Timaeus* 37C6-7), the most akin to and principle of the Monad" (ἡ μονάδος οἰκειοτάτη καὶ ἀρχῆς), and which could cosmologically signify the number of the planets, and metaphysically signify the unitary nature of God, could take on a greater importance within the first decad than any other number except the monad: "through [the hebdomad] is best given the revelation of the Father and Maker of All, for in it, as in a mirror, the mind has a vision of God as acting and creating the world and governing all that is" (*Opif.* 117).

between Philo's notion of the monad and hebdomad as overseers of the spheres of the fixed stars and planets respectively, to the similar function of the monadic Mind and the dyadic world soul in the theology of Xenocrates. Perhaps this is only an instance of Philo's bipartitioning of the Logos into a higher, noetic level and a lower, demiurgic level. If this is true, why does Philo concentrate on the hebdomadal division of the world soul, while Xenocrates stresses a dyadic division of the world soul? The solution might be found in their respective interpretations of *Timaeus* 35A-36D, where three divisions are described: a twofold division of the substance of the world soul into the circles of the Same and the Other (*Timaeus* 36B6-D7), and two other sevenfold divisions, one dividing this substance into seven parts (1:2:3:4:9:8:27; *Timaeus* 25B4-C2), and another a division of "the movement of the other" (θατέρου φορά) into seven circles (*Timaeus* 36D1-7). The division of these parts into two sequences of numbers,[40] and the division of the entire soul substance into two strips placed cross-wise to each other (*Timaeus* 36B6-D1) may have encouraged subsequent interpreters to view the cosmic soul as either a dyad (Xenocrates, Philo, Numenius, Plutarch) or as a hebdomad (Posidonius *apud* Theon of Smyrna, *Expos.* 103.16, Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis* I.6.45).[41] Thus the *Timaeus* itself may very well have provided a precedent for the notion of the dyadic (as well as hebdomadal) nature of the cosmic soul or Logos.

Another possible basis for the association of the world soul with irrationality may lie in *Timaeus* (52D-53A). Plato there ascribes a certain disorderly movement to the receptacle, caused by a disequilibrium of certain unbalanced powers (hot, cold, moist, dry) and passions that enter into it. This movement, compared to that of a winnowing basket, sepa-

rates this proto-matter into light and heavy qualities, vestiges (ἴχνη) which the demiurge will shape into the four elements by means of geometrical forms and numbers. This disorderly movement, unlike the perfectly circular and rational movement of the cosmic soul, is an irrational rectilinear motion in the six directions (cf. *Timaeus* 34A, 43B, 48A), and causes the lighter qualities to be separated from the heavier ones. Since motion can only be caused by soul, it thus appears that the contents of the receptacle in fact constitute an irrational aspect of the soul, perhaps related to the movement of the Other unchecked by the rational movement of the Same, wandering, like the soul of a newborn infant, in all the six directions (*Timaeus* 43B, 43D). Even though Plato does not explicitly introduce an irrational soul in the *Timaeus*, surely these features of the receptacle would constitute a basis for the division of the cosmic soul into a higher, rational, component, and a lower, irrational, component. One might add to this also a tendency to identify this precosmic disorder with the disorderly movement of a pre-existent but evil world soul as derived from the tenth book of Plato's *Laws* (896 D-897D).

Speusippus and Xenocrates, then, seem to be fairly clear about the source of evil. In one way or another, evil is associated or identified with the substratum of physical things. However, Plato himself envisaged the possibility of an evil world soul responsible for the evils of the physical world (for example, *Laws* X 896D-897D; 898B; 904A-C; cf. *Epinomis* 988D-E) and toyed with the notion of Forms of evil.[42] Even if there are good grounds for supposing that Plato rejected these possibilities, nonetheless it is very easy to see how the problem of connecting the irrational disorders of the receptacle or substratum to form and to the soul would become so acute for the subsequent history of philosophy and especially for the later Middle Platonic tradition.

II. The Old Pythagoreans

While these notions provide a good picture of the Platonism of the Old Academy, it is interesting to note that Speusippus and Xenocrates credit

42. See J. N. Findlay, *Plato. The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), 42-5; 416.

the inspiration behind these conceptions not to Plato, but to Pythagoras. W. Burkert attributes this phenomenon to a number of factors.[43]

In the *Timaeus* the spokesman is an Italiote, and among such people were Pythagoreans; in the *Cratylus* some of the etymologizing seems to be Pythagorean; and in the *Philebus* Plato tries to resolve the relation between the one and the many in terms of Pythagorean number and harmonic theory as well as the divinely inspired pair of opposites Limit and Unlimited (not Indefinite Dyad!). The Socratic circle included hearers of the Pythagorean Philolaus, and Plato's friendship with the Pythagorean Archytas is attested in the *Seventh Letter*. The later biographers (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* III.6) state that after the death of Socrates, Plato initially withdrew, along with other disciples of Socrates, first to Megara and to Eucleides in particular, who had already equated the One and the Good. Indeed the main background for Plato's ontology is clearly the Eleatic doctrines of Parmenides who, together with the "Eleatic Stranger," plays a major role in Plato's dialogues, and it seems that Megarians continued this line of thought. After this Plato went to Italy to see the Pythagorean philosophers Philolaus and Eurytus. Speusippus and Xenocrates also, accompanying Plato on his third Sicilian journey, most likely met Pythagoreans there.

Both the Pythagoreans and the Eleatics were immanentists, conceiving existing things as sensible, not transcendent. On the other hand, in the Platonic Academy, with its interest in transcendental entities, it seems that to a certain extent the influence of Socrates had receded into the background, having been replaced by a deepening interest in mathematics and immanentist Pythagorean number speculation to solve the increasingly perplexing problem of the relationship of the transcendent Ideas to one another.

Yet, as Burkert shows, Plato's philosophy, and that of his disciples in the Old Academy, was not Pythagorean, no matter how much they may have believed it was. The only authentic representative of ancient Pythagoreanism known to the Academy was Philolaus, a younger contemporary of Socrates. He was the first Pythagorean to break with tradition and publish writings revealing Pythagorean doctrine. Furthermore, these writings, of which only a few doxographical citations remain today, but which certainly were available in the fourth century, were most

43. The following observations are based on W. Burkert, *Pythagoreanism*, 28-52; 83-96; 218-238.

likely the source for Aristotle's (polemical) expositions of Pythagorean teaching. These constitute the only fairly complete extant summary of ancient Pythagoreanism that distinguishes it from the doctrine of Plato and the Old Academicians.

The doctrine of ancient (pre-Academic) "Pythagoreans" (not of "Pythagoras") as reconstructed from Aristotle by Burkert, is as follows: like Plato, they accepted numbers as the basic principles of things. But whereas Plato separated the numbers as transcendent Ideas from the sensible realm and may even have set between these two realms the separate realm of the geometricals, for the Pythagoreans, the numbers are immanent and corporeal: things "are" or "consist" of numbers. Their units possess magnitude and extension.

The old Pythagoreans conceived the elements of numbers to be the Odd, functioning as Limit (περάς), and the Even, which is Unlimited (ἀπειρία), a primeval cosmic opposition. Represented as rows of pebbles, the even number is female, having in its middle a space capable of reception, while the odd number is male, having a middle member with procreative power. From these two primeval principles, Unlimited (even and female) being drawn in and limited by Limit (odd and male), arises the One (ἕν). Even though this terminology bears a superficial resemblance to Plato's term the "indefinite" or "unlimited" dyad, the old Pythagorean system was rather different from Plato's. Plato posited a dyadic entity, the Indefinite Dyad (ἀόριστος δυάς) derived from the great-and-small, rather than the non-dyadic "Unlimited" of the Pythagoreans, which was part of the world, and which they conceived to have been "breathed in" by the heaven to distinguish one thing from another. Insofar as Plato's One was derived from older Pythagorean speculation, it can be seen to share in the opposition between its two Pythagorean parents; it is simultaneously even and odd, and therefore bisexual. In Plato's thought, the Unlimited becomes a Two (female) as the One penetrates it, much as, according to ancient medical speculations, the seed in the womb "breathes in" the air and is divided by it.

Burkert compares this to Hippocratic medical speculation and to the ancient cosmogony of the separation of heaven and earth, and even more specifically to the cosmogony of the Orphic "Rhapsodies."[44] In the beginning was a boundless chaos in which there arose a bubble whose

44. Damascius, *Dub. et sol.* I.316,18-319,7 Ruelle, which Burkert would attribute to Apion, and correct by eliminating the primacy of Chronos.

surface became harder by taking in the surrounding πνεῦμα. This glittering sphere is the cosmic egg, in which developed the winged bisexual Phanes, who broke the egg and "first appeared" in brilliance.[45] The two halves of the egg harmoniously formed the two firmaments, with Phanes reigning at the boundaries of the heaven, and the realms of the world and its ten perfect heavenly bodies circling the central fire arising from the procreative content of the egg. Thus pre-Socratic Pythagorean cosmology is an arithmological transposition of Orphic cosmogony. The Pythagorean numbers, especially the first four of the tetractys, form the harmonic ratios of the music of the heavenly spheres and take on certain properties: 1 is mind, 2 opinion, 3 the whole, 4 or 9 "justice," 5 "marriage," 7 is "opportune time" (καίρος), and 10 or 6 is "perfect."[46] Finally, the Pythagoreans developed their primal pair of opposites, Limit and Unlimited, into a table of ten opposites arranged in two columns of cognates:[47]

Limit	Unlimited
Odd	Even
One	Multiplicity
Right	Left
Male	Female
Resting	Moving
Straight	Crooked
Light	Darkness
Good	Bad
Square	Oblong

Burkert observes that these opposites form a point of continuous transition between Pythagoreanism and the Platonism of the Old Academy. What Plato borrowed from the Pythagoreans was principally the pair Limit-Unlimited and a certain emphasis on number and proportion as

45. Cf. the Sethian Gnostic figure of Protophanes, perfect male Mind in the Aeon of Barbelo.

46. Cf. the similar numerology in *Marsanes* (X 32,5-33,9) and ps-Iamblichus' *Theologoumena arithmeticae* discussed in Chapter 14.

47. Aristotle, *Met.* I 986a22-26: ἕτεροι δὲ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων τὰς ἀρχὰς δέκα λέγουσιν εἶναι τὰς κατὰ συστοιχίαν λεγομένας, πέρας [καὶ] ἄπειρον, περιττὸν [καὶ] ἄρτιον, ἓν [καὶ] πλῆθος, δεξιὸν [καὶ] ἀριστερόν, ἄρρεν [καὶ] θῆλυ, ἠρεμοῦν [καὶ] κινούμενον, εὐθὺ [καὶ] καμπύλον, φῶς [καὶ] σκότος, ἀγαθὸν [καὶ] κακόν, τετράγωνον [καὶ] ἑτερόμηκες·

the principle of cosmic order. For the immanent "Unlimited" Plato substituted the transcendent Indefinite Dyad to express the continuous indefiniteness on either side of the scale between great-and-small, more-and-less, etc.

This doctrine was proposed as a transcendental solution to the Parmenidean-Eleatic problem of the relationship between pure and stable being, which is One, and the "unthinkable" world of plurality and becoming we all observe. The generative character of Pythagorean mathematics applied to a stage-by-stage movement from 1) the transcendent, ultimate One to 2) the transcendent numbers, to 3) the harmonic proportions of the living World Soul which animates the heavenly and earthly bodies below it. This dynamic scheme of derivation broke through the inflexibility of the Eleatic system. The order of stable being can be expressed by the One and the Dyad and the ideas by the ideal numbers. Change is gradually introduced by the animated World Soul harmonized by numerical proportion and forced into motion by the opposition of Sameness and Difference. The elements of the physical world are generated by plane or solid geometrical figures bound together and set in motion by the Soul.

While there was a book by Philolaus used by Aristotle, there was no book by Pythagoras. Plato most likely picked up Pythagorean doctrine from Archytas. Yet Plato's immediate disciples, in their exposition of the *Timaeus* and of the derivation system worked out by Plato and themselves in the Old Academy, attributed all this doctrine to the "ancients." Indeed they attributed it to Pythagoras himself, simply skipping over the century and a half that separated them from Pythagoras as well as the work of more contemporary Pythagoreans such as Eurytas, Archytas and Philolaus.

Burkert suggests that this apparent defection from the name of Plato in favor of that of Pythagoras may have owed to the spirit of the contemporary Pythagoreans with whom they and Plato associated, and who similarly ascribed their own thought completely to Pythagoras. Thus Speusippus, Xenocrates and the other Academicians except Aristotle likewise saw their own and their master's work as a continuation of Pythagoreanism. And this interpretation became dominant in the doxographies of the later tradition, which likewise saw Pythagoras only through the eyes of Plato and the old Academy. The Old Academicians produced for posterity convenient summaries of their Platonism under

the name of Pythagoras, while the authentic Pythagorean doctrine presented by Aristotle, scattered throughout his works and presented in polemical fashion, was ignored. Thus the Platonic metaphysical speculation worked out by the generation of Plato's immediate successors under the name of Pythagoras carried the day.

After the death of Plato (427-347 BCE), this tradition continued through successive heads of the Academy, Speusippus (407-313), Xenocrates (396-314), and Polemon (350-267), until in 265 BCE Arcesilaus (318-242), succeeded by Bion and Carneades (213-129), turned the Academy from the "dogmatism" of metaphysical speculation towards the skepticism of Pyrrho (365-270) and Timon (320-230). The "New Academy" justified this move as a revival of the Socratic method.

Naturally at this time "Pythagoras" (i.e. Plato) lost his authority and, along with him, all his and the Old Academy's mathematical and metaphysical work was rejected as non-Academic. Such of this metaphysical Platonism as survived in the "underground" outside the Middle or New Academy was somehow kept alive, but under the name of Pythagoras, with the ironic result that by the second century CE some thinkers could call Plato and his disciples plagiarists of Pythagoras. Thus, as Burkert observes, a fairly exact transcript of Plato's lecture "On the Good" is presented by Sextus Empiricus (160-210 CE; *Adv. math.* X.248-284) in the context of a skeptical refutation of Pythagoras which cites the Plato of the exoteric dialogues (the *Phaedo*) at length against "Pythagoras."

Indeed, as Burkert notes, in just as unhistorical a way, when Antiochus of Ascalon (130-68 BCE) led the Academy away from the leadership of the skeptic Philo of Larissa (head from 110-88) back to "dogmatic" ways, skeptics like Aenesidemus (100-40) and Sextus Empiricus (150-170 CE) sought a new founder instead of Plato or Socrates to whom they might trace the origins of the skeptical tradition of the New Academy, and found such a one in Pyrrho.

CHAPTER NINE

MIDDLE PLATONIC SPECULATION ON FIRST PRINCIPLES

We continue this survey of Platonic metaphysics with some observations about selected Middle Platonic, Neopythagorean, and, in Chapter 10, Neoplatonic metaphysical doctrines that are reflected in the Sethian Gnostic texts and doctrines that will be treated in beginning in Chapter 12. These observations are not intended to be complete or systematic, but are limited to features that help to place the Sethian texts in the context of later Greek philosophy.

I. The Revival of Platonism in the First Century BCE

After the time of Polemon (350-267 BCE), the Academy turned away from metaphysical speculation altogether. This so-called "New Academy" justified this move as a revival of the Socratic method. All the mathematical and metaphysical work of Plato and the Old Academy was rejected as non-Platonic and due to Pythagorean contamination. Although the Academy turned back to dogmatism under Antiochus, in 88 BCE its members, along with other philosophers who had disapproved of the alliance of Athens with Mithridates III against Rome, fled the city as Mithridates approached. Philo of Larissa, the last head of the Academy, went to Rome, and Antiochus of Ascalon, the present head, went by way of Rome to Alexandria and there broke with Philo.[1] During Sulla's siege on disloyal Athens in 87-86 BCE, the buildings and library of the Academy were destroyed. With this event, the institutional history of the Academy, with its nearly unbroken oral tradition and succession of scholarchs descending from Plato—as well as that of the other Athenian schools, the Lyceum of the Peripatetics, the Porch of the Stoics, and the Garden of the Epicureans—came to an end, and would only be formally reestablished by the emperor Marcus Aurelius in 176 CE. For the next century, the Platonic and other philosophical schools were

1. See H. Dörrie, "Die Erneuerung des Platonismus im ersten Jahrhundert vor Christus," in *Le Néoplatonisme: Colloques internationaux du Centre nationale de la recherche scientifique, Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1971), 17-28.

spread throughout the towns and cities of the Mediterranean basin; their principal occupation now became that of commenting on the authoritative texts descending from the founders. In the case of the Middle Platonists, the principal text demanding such commentary was Plato's *Timaeus*.[2]

When Cicero visited Athens six years later he found the Philo and Antiochus back in Athens teaching in the Ptolemaeion gymnasium. Philo was professing the skeptic doctrine of the last 180 years, while Antiochus, having taken up with Old Academic doctrine through the eyes of Aristotle and Polemon, was teaching virtually the same thing as a brand of Stoicism under the name of original Platonism. He seems to have identified the Demiurge and World Soul of Plato's *Timaeus* with the Stoic Pneuma-Logos, and the Ideas constituting the paradigm of the Living Being with the λόγοι σπερματικοί comprising the intellect of the Stoic Logos. In doing this, he may have originated the Middle Platonic notion of the Ideas as the thoughts of God (although Plato himself, the Old Academy and Xenocrates, Aristotle and the Peripatetic tradition, Alcimus, the Neopythagoreans, Posidonius, Antiochus, Varro, Eudorus, and Arius Didymus have been credited with this development).[3] Thus it is possible that the concept of the ideas as the thoughts of God emerges from a reconciliation between the *Timaeus* and Stoicism.[4]

H. Dörrie has stressed the centrality of the *Timaeus* in the revival of Platonism in the first century BCE.[5] It offered to people like Cicero and his contemporaries a cosmology that explained, indeed revealed, the supreme cause of the world as a divine and paternal figure who had made it as good as possible a copy of his own divine thoughts. Such a doctrine was much more attractive to the popular religious sentiment of the time, inseminated by many Pythagorean and other apocryphal works, than was the dry moralism and rather immanentist and mechanical cosmology of the Stoics, not to mention the tough-minded nontheistic atomism and ascetic moralism of the Epicureans.

2. Thus L. BRISSON, "Qualche aspetto della storia del Platonismo," *Elenchos* 20 (1999), 145-169, here 156-157.

3. For a review see R. JONES, "The Ideas as the Thoughts of God," *Classical Philology* 21 (1926), 317-326.

4. See A. RICH, "The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God," *Mnemosyne*. 4, 7 (1954), 125-126.

5. H. DÖRRIE, "Le renouveau du platonisme à l'époque de Cicéron," *Revue de Philosophie et de Théologie* 8 (1974), 13-29.

In time, this Platonist Bible, as well as its imitations, was read by everyone who was able. In distinction to the eternal world cycles of Stoicism and the traditional Greek dogma of the eternity of the universe at home in the other philosophical schools, the *Timaeus*, when read literally, revealed, like the doctrine of the Jews, a once-for-all act of creation by a divine craftsman according to a definite plan. According to this reading, there were three primal principles of all things: God, Ideas or Model, and Matter. God was identified with the Good from the *Republic* and the demiurge from the *Timaeus*. The Model is the intelligible Forms, understood as his thoughts, which God contemplates to give order to disorderly Matter.

Varro (116-28 BCE), the most learned Roman of his day, found in the Capitoline trinity of Jove, Juno and Minerva the three Platonic causes (heaven = "that by which"; earth = "that from which"; and the exemplary ideas = "that according to which," *apud* Augustine, *De civ. dei* VII.128); he even took this as a revelation emanating from the sanctuary of the Cabiri at Samothrace.[6] In like spirit, Cicero, in his translation of the *Timaeus*, substituted his friend Publius Nigidius Figulus (98-45 BCE), the next most learned Roman of his day after Varro, for Plato's man from Italy. Nigidius was a principal reviver of Pythagoreanism in his day, perhaps having become acquainted with it through Alexander Polyhistor, a Greek scholar taken slave at the end of the Mithridatic war in 82 and given citizenship by Sulla.

II. NEOPYTHAGOREAN PLATONISM

From the third century BCE onwards, apocryphal Pythagorean writings in the name of Pythagoras, Brotinus, Archytas, Eurytos, Occelus, Timaeus Locrus and even Pythagoras' wife Theano and many others began to make their appearance, claiming both Old Academic and Peripatetic philosophy for Pythagoras' own. Numenius (frgs. 24-28 des Places) in the mid-second century CE did precisely this. Later Pythagoreanism, commonly referred to as Neopythagoreanism, could, as Burkert says, be defined as Old Academic Platonism with the Socratic and dialectic element amputated. Aside from ancient Pythagorean tradition, the principal source for Neopythagorean doctrine was Old Academic mathematics on

6. W. THEILER, *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus* (Problemata, Forschungen zur Klassischen Philologie 1; Berlin: Weidmann, 1930), 18-19.

the one hand and Plato's myths, especially that of the *Timaeus*, on the other hand; these merged with Middle Platonism to become Neoplatonism. The Hellenistic Pseudopythagorica appeared as only one part of a plethora of apocryphal materials under names like Democritus, Ostanes, Zoroaster and Nechepso-Petosiris. Most of these and even the author Bolus of Mendes were popularly regarded as Pythagoreans, but were not really: as Burkert says,[7] in "Hellenistic times there was a whole flood of Pythagorean literature, but no real Pythagoreans." Instead, it was all underground Platonism. Even second century Rome was introduced to Greek thought in this way. It derived its knowledge of the cosmos and its regularity not directly from the *Timaeus* or Archimedes or Eratosthenes, but from apocryphal mixtures of Platonic, Stoic, and Peripatetic cosmology under the name of Pythagoras, the ancient citizen of South Italy.

Although the previously mentioned Hellenistic Pseudopythagorica did not seem to know the *Timaeus* of Plato, at least one of them, the *Timaeus Locrus*, circulated as a counterfeit of the *Timaeus*, accusing Plato of being a falsifier of Pythagorean doctrine. According to Dörrie,[8] the Neopythagoreans, who in time claimed the *Timaeus* and Old Academic Platonism as their own, were little interested in theoretical philosophy, and preferred instead a "philosophic life style" informed by even more revelatory literature which, like the later *Hermetica*, expressed similar doctrine but in a simpler, more religious form. While they were popularizers, the committed students of Plato congregated in esoteric schools and were interested in philosophical theory. But by now they were so far removed from the source of a living tradition that it was necessary to rely upon digests, summaries and doxographies of the ancient Platonic doctrine in the form of handbooks like that of Alcinous/Albinus in the

7. W. BURKERT, "Hellenistische Pseudopythagorica," *Philologus* 105 (1961), 28-43, here 23-24; on this general subject, see also *Pseudepigrapha: Pseudopythagorica, Lettres de Platon, littérature pseudépigraphique juive*, ed. K. von Fritz (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique XVIII. Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1972). See H. THESLEFF, *An introduction to the Pythagorean writings of the Hellenistic period* (Acta Academiae Aboensis. Ser. A: Humaniora 24,3. Åbo, Åbo akademi, 1961) and *The Pythagorean texts of the Hellenistic period* (Acta Academiae Aboensis. Ser. A: Humaniora 30,1. Åbo, Åbo Akademi, 1965).

8. H. DÖRRIE, "Le renouveau du platonisme à l'époque de Cicéron," *Revue de Philosophie et de Théologie* 8 (1974), 13-29, here 25-26.

second century CE.[9] Dörrie thinks this doxographical tradition began in the age of Cicero, a classic doxographer being Arius Didymus, who taught philosophy to the future Emperor Augustus. The doxographers stress the three principles of Creator, Matter and Ideas supposedly to be found in the *Timaeus*, although other philosophers, e.g. Philo of Alexandria (*Cher.* 125-127) emphasized a final cause beyond the Creator, the Creator's idea of the Good which impels the Creator to make the world as good as possible. In spite of these theological interests, however, Platonists were essentially ivory tower intellectuals, considering that the subtleties of Platonic doctrine were inexpressible to the masses, whom they left to such as the Stoics.

The Platonism of the first century BCE was thus a peculiar mixture of religious zeal and a classical reservation which submitted to the authority of a self-imposed tradition, that of the Plato they knew. Reluctance to stray from the authoritative tradition prevented novelty. Only details, not major reevaluations, were discussed. Yet this later Platonism provided a truly comprehensive picture of all the levels of reality into which the details of the universe would fit and find meaning and intelligibility in light of the cosmic Intellect and Soul which bound everything together; the whole interprets the parts. And it was precisely this urban, self-enclosed, traditional, nearly conventicle-like pursuit of transcendental metaphysics on the part of school Platonists that increasingly attracted like-minded but less pedantic kindred, such as Neopythagoreans, Hermetics and of course the Gnostics.

A. Eudorus of Alexandria and Neopythagorean Systems of Derivation

H. Dörrie marks the decisive stage in the revival of Platonism by the activity of the generation after Cicero, marked especially by Eudorus (fl. 25 BCE) of Alexandria. Back in 86 BCE, Antiochus had accompanied the Roman quaestor Lucullus to Alexandria, leaving his brother Aristus in charge at Athens. In Alexandria, Antiochus acquired as students Aris-

9. A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* II: *Le Dieu cosmique* (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1949), 341-362, attributes the philosophical eclecticism and religious dogmatism of Cicero's time to the diffusion and consequent vulgarization of culture which led to the wide use of introductory manuals and the exclusive use of doxographies in place of the direct study of original philosophical writings.

ton, a Peripatetic, and Dion, an Academic who served as an ambassador to Rome in 57 BCE, where he was murdered. Strabo (64 BCE – 19 CE) implies that Eudorus was a contemporary and rival of Ariston.

Dillon suggests that Eudorus may have studied with Dion in Alexandria around 60 BCE.[10] Eudorus had a thorough knowledge of Plato's dialogues, and concluded that assimilation to God was the consistent goal of Plato's doctrine.[11] In addition, Eudorus was a Pythagorean; according to Simplicius (*In Phys.* 9.181,10-30 Diels) Eudorus posited a supreme One as the supreme God above another pair of principles, a lower One, which he calls Monad, and its opposite, the Dyad.

> According to the highest explanation (ἀνωτάτω λόγον) it is to be said that the Pythagoreans called the One (τὸ ἕν) the principle (ἀρχή) of all things; according to the second explanation (δεύτερον λόγον), there are two principles of products (ἀποτελουμένων), the One and the nature opposed (ἐναντίαν) to it, and of all the entities conceived as opposites, the good ones are ranged under the One and the evil under the opposed nature. Thus these two principles are not the ultimate principle according to these people, since if the one is principle of one set of opposites and the other principle of the other, they are not the common principles (λοιναὶ ἀρχαί) of all things, as is the One ... thus in another way (ἄλλον τρόπον) they said that the One is the principle of all things, of both matter (ὕλη) and of determinate beings (τῶν ὄντων), and this would be the supreme God (ὑπεράνω θεόν).... So I say those around Pythagoras left the One as the principle of all things, and in another way (ἄλλον τρόπον) introduced the two sets of

10. J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, 115-135; cf. A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* IV: *Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose* (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1954), 18-53. Festugière has shown that in Eudorus one finds a hierarchy of three "ones": The One (ἕν) as universal principle (ἀρχή); the One (μονάς) as the fundamental element (στοιχεῖον) opposed to the Indefinite Dyad; and the one which is the root of ordinary arithmetical numbers. When Eudorus assimilates the highest One to the supreme God (ὑπερανὼ θεός), one has the absolute transcendence of God, in effect, beyond being. Festugière (*op. cit.*, 43-53) also points out that Xenocrates (frg. 15 Heinze) conceived the Monad as male father and the Dyad as female mother of the Gods. On the basis of *Orph. frg.* 21,4 Kern (whose antiquity is supported by the Derveni papyrus), and the Stoicizing Diogenes of Babylon (240-152 BCE, *apud* Philodemus, *De piet.* 82.3 Gomperz = *Dox.* 548b14 Diels), both of which witness the concept of Zeus as both male and female, Festugière would date the concept of the bisexuality of the Monad to around 300 BC. From such a complex of ideas might have arisen the (non-Old-Academic) notion that the Monad gives rise to the Dyad, which is in turn mother of the numbers one, two, three, etc.

11. Cf. *Theaetetus* 176B; *Timaeus* 90A-D; *Republic* X 608C; *Laws* IV 716A; see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 115.

> the highest elements (δύο τὰ ἀνωτάτω στοιχεῖα); they call these two sets of elements by many names—the one set contains the ordered, defined, knowable, male, odd, right, and light, the opposite set contains the disordered, indefinite, unknown, female, even, left and dark—such that on the one hand the One is taken as a principle (αρχή) and on the other the One and the indefinite Dyad are taken as these elements (στοιχεῖα), both principles again being one (ἀρχαὶ ἄμφω ἓν ὄντα πάλιν); clearly the One as principle of all things is one thing, while quite another is the One opposed to the Dyad, which they call the Monad (μονάδα). (Simplicius, *In Aristotelis physicorum* 9.181,10-30 Diels)

The supreme One is the cause of Matter and all else, while the Dyad paired with the Monad beneath it he calls the Indefinite Dyad.[12] J. M. Rist thinks that Eudorus' doctrine of two Ones derives from an original interpretation of the Pythagorean Memoirs of Alexander Polyhistor.[13] These Memoirs suggest that in 70 BCE the only Pythagorean doctrine known to Alexander was one in which a Monad gives rise to an Indefinite Dyad as matter for the Monad, with no supreme One beyond:

> Alexander in the Successions of the Philosophers, drawing upon the Pythagorean Memoirs, says that the principle of all things is the Monad; from this Monad there comes into existence the Indefinite Dyad as matter for the Monad, which is cause (ἐκ δὲ τῆς μονάδος ἀόριστον δυάδα ὡς ἂν ὕλην τῇ μονάδι αἰτίῳ ὄντι ὑποστῆναι). From the Monad and the Indefinite Dyad arise the numbers; from numbers, points; from these, lines; from these,

12. Thus A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* IV: *Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose* (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1954), 18-53. H. J. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1967), 276-277, relates Philo's three-level metaphysic to the four-level metaphysic of Moderatus and Eudorus.

13. "The Neoplatonic One and Plato's *Parmenides*," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 93 (1962), 389-401; cf. J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, 342. J. MANSFELD ("Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. R. Van den Broek *et al.*, [Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 112; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988], 92-117) observes that the Pythagorean Memoirs present a monistic system in which the first two opposites are to be found on different levels, one subordinate to the other, while Eudorus places them on the same level below that of the supreme One, apparently in an original effort to reconcile the monistic (as in Alexander and earlier in Aristotle, *Met.* I 986b11-987a2) and dualistic (as in 985b23-986b11) versions of Pythagorean doctrine known to him, by placing the monistic One (ἕν) inherently containing the opposites (even and odd, limited and unlimited, 986a17-20) above the dualistic συστοιχίαι of opposites (986a22-26).

> plane figures; from plane figures, solids; from solid figures there arise sensible bodies, the elements of which are four: fire, water, earth and air. These elements interchange and turn into one another completely and combine to produce a cosmos: animate, intelligent, and spherical (μεταβάλλειν δὲ καὶ τρέπεσθαι δι' ὅλων, καὶ γίνεσθαι ἐξ αὐτῶν κόσμον ἔμψυχον, νοερόν, σφαιροειδῆ), with the earth at its center, the earth itself also being spherical and inhabited round about. (Alexander *apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* VIII 24.7-25.10, trans. Dillon)

Perhaps Eudorus' doctrine of a supreme One is his interpretation of the intelligent "fourth" cause (God, Mind, Wisdom) of *Philebus* 23C-D, responsible for the mixture of Limit and Unlimited that yields the genesis of things, as a supreme One, perhaps under the influence of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. Perhaps Eudorus was, as J. Mansfeld thinks, influenced by the tradition of a divine One earlier posited by Xenophanes.[14] Perhaps the idea of a unitary, active cause giving rise to the Indefinite Dyad as passive matter owes something to Stoic doctrine as well.[15] Whatever the case, Eudorus made a definite move towards metaphysical monism.

Perhaps contemporary with Eudorus are two Neopythagorean systems: One is cited by Syrianus in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (165,33-166,6 Kroll) according to which Archaenetus, Philolaus and Brotinus posited a unitary causal principle above the Limit and Unlimited, which Brotinus says is beyond intelligence and being.[16] The

14. J. MANSFELD, "Compatible Alternatives," thinks Eudorus' placing of a supreme One beyond paired opposites owes to the influence of Xenophanes' (*apud* Theophrastus' lost *Physikai doxai* and Aristotle, *Met.* I 986b21-25) teaching of a divine One whose attributes (whether at rest or in motion, whether limited or unlimited) were left unclear; Mansfeld thinks Eudorus himself supplemented the Xenophanes doxography with attributes that later defined the canonical god of Xeonphanes (found, e.g., in Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.22,2-29,14): God is one, eternal, homogeneous, limited, spherical, unmoved, rational, cause of all things and transcends all pairs of opposites.

15. God, or logos, as active cause and matter as passive cause is Stoic doctrine, Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* VII 134.

16. Syrianus, *In Met.* 165,33-166,6 Kroll: ὅλως δὲ οὐδὲ ἀπὸ τῶν ὡσανεὶ ἀντικειμένων οἱ ἄνδρες ἤρχοντο, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν δύο συστοιχιῶν τὸ ἐπέκεινα ἤδεσαν, ὡς μαρτυρεῖ Φιλόλαος τὸν θεὸν λέγων 166 πέρας καὶ ἀπειρίαν ὑποστῆσαι, διὰ μὲν τοῦ πέρατος τὴν τῷ ἑνὶ συγγενεστέραν ἐνδεικνύμενος πᾶσαν συστοιχίαν, διὰ δὲ τῆς ἀπειρίας τὴν ταύτης ὑφειμένην, καὶ ἔτι πρὸ τῶν δύο ἀρχῶν τὴν ἑνιαίαν αἰτίαν καὶ πάντων ἐξῃρημένην προέταττον, ἣν Ἀρχαίνετος μὲν αἰτίαν πρὸ αἰτίας εἶναί φησι, Φιλόλαος δὲ τῶν πάντων ἀρχὴν

other is cited by Stobaeus (*Anthologium* I.41.2,1-50 = 1.278-9 Wachsmuth) from Pseudo-Archytas' *Peri Archôn*, according to which, beyond the two principles of Form and Matter, corresponding to Monad and Dyad, there is a self-moving primary power, a God superior to intelligence which unites the lower two principles.[17] A similar doctrine is also found in the "Pythagorean" report of Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. math.* X 276-278):[18]

> Thence moved, Pythagoras (i.e. Plato) declared that the Monad is the first principle of existing things (ἀρχὴ τῶν ὄντων) by participation (κατὰ μετοχήν) in which each of the existing things is said to be one. And this when conceived in self-identity (καθ' αὐτότητα, i.e. absolutely) is a Monad, but when in its otherness (καθ' ἑτερότητα) it is added to itself, it creates the Indefinite Dyad. The highest Principles of all therefore emerge as the prime Monad and the Indefinite Dyad (ἥ τε πρώτη μονὰς καὶ ἡ ἀόριστος δυάς). From these Principles arose the number One and the Dyad which succeeded it; from the prime Monad the number One (ἀπὸ μὲν πρώτης μονάδος τὸ ἕν); and from both the prime Monad and the Indefi-

εἶναι διϊσχυρίζεται, Βροτῖνος δὲ ὡς νοῦ παντὸς καὶ οὐσίας δυνάμει καὶ πρεσβείᾳ ὑπερέχει·

17. *Anthologium* I.41.2,27-31: ὥστε τρεῖς ἀρχὰς εἶμεν ἤδη, τόν τε θεὸν καὶ τὰν ἑστὼ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τὰν μορφώ. Καὶ τὸν μὲν θεὸν <τὸν> τεχνίταν καὶ τὸν κινέοντα, τὰν δ' ἑστὼ τὰν ὕλαν καὶ τὸ κινεόμενον, τὰν δὲ μορφὼ τὰν τέχναν καὶ ποθ' ἃν κινέεται ὑπὸ τῶ κινέοντος ἃ ἑστώ. According to P. MERLAN, "Greek Philosophy from Plato to Plotinus," in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (ed. A. H. Armstrong; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 85, citing Aristotle's *On Prayer*, frg. 4a Rose and *Eth. Eud.* 7.1248a, this stress on a principle beyond intelligence may go back to Aristotle.

18. This is quite likely a digest of the doctrine of ideal numbers deriving from Plato's lecture "On the Good," cf. BURKERT, *Ancient Pythagoreanism*, 53 n. 4. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, 344, thinks the immediate source of this passage may be the Pythagorean Platonist Thrasyllos of Alexandria, the court philosopher of Tiberius (Emperor 14-37 CE), who edited the dialogues of Plato and composed an astrological work used by Theon of Smyrna (ca. 100 CE). The Monad is described as self-identity (αὐτότης) and by being added to itself, gives rise to otherness (ἑτερότης), i.e., the Indefinite Dyad. Related to this theory is a system of categories distinguishing between the absolute (κατὰ διαφοράν), the contrary (κατ' ἐναντίωσιν) and the relative (πρός τι); cf. Plato's oral teaching *apud* Hermodorus in Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.247,30-248,20 Diels where absolute (καθ' αὐτά) is opposed to relative (πρὸς ἕτερα), the latter subdivided into contrary (ὡς πρὸς ἐναντία) and indeterminate (ὡς πρὸς τι). The category of the absolute belongs only to the Monad, that of the contrary is related both to the Monad and Dyad since it is defined as either equal or unequal (by mutual exclusion), while that of the relative is related to more and less, thus is wholly undefined and belongs only to the indefinite Dyad.

> nite Dyad the number Two. Twice One is Two, and since there was not as yet a Two or a Twice among numbers, the number Two arose out of the Indefinite Dyad, and so was the offspring of this Dyad and the Monad (καὶ οὕτως ἐκ ταύτης τε καὶ τῆς μονάδος ἐγένετο ἡ ἐν τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς δυάς). In the same way the rest of the numbers are produced from these, the Monad playing the role of active cause and the Dyad that of passive Matter, the Monad imposing Limit and giving rise to the 1, while the 2 arises from the doubling influence of the Dyad upon the Monad and extending the numbers on to infinite multiplicity (τοῦ μὲν ἑνὸς ἀεὶ περατοῦντος, τῆς δὲ ἀορίστου δυάδος δύο γεννώσης καὶ εἰς ἄπειρον πλῆθος τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς ἐκτεινούσης). From the first four numbers arise point, line, plane and solid.

All this implies that the doctrine of a supreme One (ἕν but sometimes μονάς) beyond and even giving rise to a pair of opposed principles was first formulated in arithmological language in the mid-first century BCE.[19] During this period, the Old Academic dualistic doctrine of the coeval One and Indefinite Dyad was developed in a monistic direction not found anywhere in the Old Academy (which always adhered to the doctrine of two opposite principles). Dillon[20] observes that this doctrine of a supreme One appealed to Eudorus' contemporary Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE – 40 CE) and is to be found later in Moderatus (late first century CE), in the *Chaldaean Oracles* (late second century CE), in Plotinus and the Neoplatonists, and in the Neopythagorean arithmologists such as Theon and Nicomachus in the early second century CE. This monism is also to be found among Gnostics such as Basilides, the Valentinian system of Hippolytus' *Refutations*, the "Simonian" *Megale Apophasis* and of course the Sethian Gnostics.

The Neopythagorean derivation of an Indefinite Dyad from the Monad (not witnessed in the Old Academy) and the interaction of these two principles to produce the triad as the first real number would then provide a metaphysical system of ontological derivation that might serve to interpret the Father-Mother-Child triad of Plato's *Timaeus*. In this way the Monad becomes a Dyad by a process of self-doubling[21] or by division[22] or by extension (ἔκτασις) or progression from potentiality as in a seed,[23] or by privation or contraction or "receding from its nature,"[24] or by flowing (an idea perhaps first introduced by Archytas).[25] The notion of a dyadic principle of indefiniteness pre-existing in the monad became a feature of several second-century Gnostic theogonies: according to Hippolytus, both the Valentinians (*Ref.* VI.29.5-6) and the "Simonian" *Megale Apophasis* (*Ref.* VI.18.4-7) used the concept of the emanation (προβολή, προέρχεσθαι) of a dyad preexisting in the monad. By describing the passion of Sophia as a flowing or extension into indefiniteness the Valentinian school incorporated into tragic myth the Neopythagorean derivation of plurality as the derivation of a dyad from the monad. In the *Apocryphon of John*, Barbelo is derived from the Monad as the product of the former's self-reflection. The Sethian Platonizing treatises utilize, besides the Existence, Vitality, Mentality progression, also the notions of privation and the self-extension of the supreme unitary principle into the multiplicity first arising in the Barbelo Aeon.[26]

19. The ultimate inspiration behind this notion may lie in Aristotle's transcendent self-thinking active intelligence, which is immaterial, pure form and is indeed God.

20. *The Middle Platonists*, 128-130.

21. διπλασιασμός, ἐπισύνθεσις ἑαυτῇ: Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio* 27,1-7; 94,10-18; 100,9-12 Hiller; Nicomachus, *Intro. Arith.* 113,2-10 Hoche; Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoniae hypotyposes* 3.153; *Adversus mathematicos* 10.261; Hippolytus, *Ref.* IV.43, or begetting <Iamblichus> *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 3.17-4,7 de Falco.

22. διαχωρισμός: <Iamblichus>, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 5,4-5; 8,20-9,7; 13,9-11 de Falco.

23. ἔκτασις / ἐπέκτασις: Nicomachus *apud* <Iamblichus> *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 3,1-8; 16,4-11 de Falco; in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I 2.2; 3.3 the passion of Sophia is characterized as (indefinite) extension and flowing.

24. κατὰ στέρησιν αὐτοῦ χωρεῖν: Moderatus, *apud* Simplicius, *In phy.* 9.230,34-231,27 Diels; Numenius, frg. 52 des Places; see below on Moderatus and Numenius.

25. ῥύειν, ῥύσις: Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* III.19, 28, 77; VII.99; IX.380-381; X.281, an idea perhaps first introduced by Archytas.

26. By privation in *Zostrianos* VIII 80,11-18, by self-extension in *Marsanes* X 32,5-33,2 and *Allogenes* XI 45,22-24 (preceded by contraction) and by division in *3 Steles Seth* VII 121,25-123,14 (combined with ἔκτασις in *Zostrianos* VIII 81,1-20 and with withdrawal in *Marsanes* X 9,1-21).

27. Among the more salient for our purposes are: *Opif.* 1-99 and *QE* II.68 on the structure of the intelligible world; *Abr.* 120-123, *Spec. Leg.* III.180, and *Heres* 160 on the monad, dyad and powers; *Heres* 133-236 and *Vita Mosis* II.127 on the Logos;

B. Philo of Alexandria

Many of Neopythagorean features may be found in the works of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE – 40 CE). Although he rarely gives a direct exposition of his metaphysical scheme, it can be recovered from many passages throughout his writings.[27] On the basis of these passages and

Dillon's analysis of them, one might venture the following sketch of Philo's very fluid metaphysics: the supreme principle 1) is ὁ θεός, the personal Creator-God, called One, Monad and true being, who is nevertheless ineffable; his existence, but not essence, can be known. Closely associated with him are 2) his image, the Monad, a sort of "super-transcendent" logos, and 3) Sophia, the mother of the all, sometimes considered as material cause (nurse, receptacle), i.e. the indefinite dyad. The second God (θεός, not ὁ θεός, *Somn.* I.229) is 4) the Logos, the place of the Ideas (κόσμος νοητός), the image, shadow and Son of God. The Logos is the divine mind which can be said to spring from Sophia its mother, although for humans the two are identical. Associated with the Logos are 5) four principal powers (animated Ideas); the chiefest of these constitute the Dyad: Goodness (the creative power by which God creates the world) and Sovereignty (the regal power by which God rules the world); respectively associated with these are another two, the "Beneficent" and the "Punitive." We are led to believe that the Logos and his four powers (plus many others conceived as ideas and mathematicals) constitute a pentad which comprises the intelligible world marked off by a sort of boundary or aeon called the Ark.[28] Finally on a lower level, there is the κόσμος αἰσθητός, presided over by 6) the Logos in its immanent aspect as God's elder Son, governing 7) the visible world over which he presides, which is God's younger son.

This is a hybrid sketch of his system, drawn from many passages in Philo's works, not all of which precisely agree with each other. Philo was a biblical exegete, not a systematic philosopher. Much of his metaphysics was drawn from handbooks, and exhibits a maddening fluidity. In any case it is clear that Philo's ontology consists of four basic levels: God; the transcendent Logos or intelligible world; the immanent creative Logos; and finally the visible world. This is much like the Old Academic structure of two complementary principles except for the adoption of the term λόγος as elder son of God and place of the ideas, and his positing the supreme God as a unique principle at the summit of the hierarchy. The transcendent Logos corresponds to the realm of the Ideas

Fuga 109, *Det.* 115-116, *Ebr.* 30-31 and *Migr.* 40-46 on Sophia; and *Opif.* 30-33; 47-52; 49-128, *QG* IV.8, 110 and *QE* 88-93 on arithmology.

28. Cf. *QE* 2.68 where two further powers, the merciful and the legislative, spring respectively from the creative and ruling powers; these four plus the Logos are contained in the Ark as a pentad. On such pentads, see Chapter 4, note 49.

or mathematicals, and the immanent Logos to the World Soul. On the other hand, the initial triad of God, Monad and Sophia seems to reflect and confirm the existence of the Neopythagorean systems described immediately above, especially that of Eudorus, who posited a transcendent One who is the supreme God, followed by a Monad and a Dyad, and whose thought was likely to be known by Philo, his near-contemporary in Alexandria. In the *de Abrahamo* (121-123) it is said that God can appear to the purified mind as the One beyond the dyad and monad, and to the uninitiated mind as a triad composed of God situated in the midst of his two chief powers, the creative and regnant.[29] Although the *de Abrahamo* passage concerns Philo's two chief powers, Dillon observes that the dyad appears in Philo not only as the image of matter or as a pair of subordinate powers, but also as a transcendent generative principle, the Old Academic unlimited dyad. Philo knows of this principle, not under this name, but under that of its *alter ego*, the receptacle and nurse of becoming in the third part of Plato's *Timaeus*. This entity is identified with Sophia, the divine Wisdom, who sometimes functions as the mother of God's eldest son, the Logos, and thus as mother of both the noetic and the perceptible cosmos. The use of the term dyad to refer both to matter and to a transcendent maternal principle depends upon an equation between Plato's unlimited dyad and receptacle of becoming, which appears in many Middle Platonic authors.

On at least one occasion, Philo depicts God as Father, closely associated with a feminine consort, his own knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), who bore the sensible world as her Son. He goes on to characterize this feminine being as Sophia, God's eldest daughter, Mother and Nurse of the All, that is, as Plato's receptacle of becoming (*Ebr.* 31.6; cf. *Det.* 116-117):[30]

29. In the scriptures God is properly called "he who is" (ὁ ὤν), and can appear in two ways: On the one hand, he appears as one (ἕν) to the highly purified mind (διάνοια) when it is led to the unmixed, simple and self-subsistent ideal form (ἰδέα) beyond the multiplicity of other numbers, including the dyad which is next to the monad (τὴν γείτονα μονάδος δυάς). On the other hand, he can appear as three (τρία), when the as yet uninitiated mind is unable to comprehend true being (τὸ ὄν) as by itself, but only as either creating or ruling the creation (τὸν γενομένον), occupying the midpoint (μέσος) between his two senior powers (δυνάμεις), the creative (ποιητική, called θεός) and the royal (βασιλική, called κύριος).

30. *Ebr.* 31.6: εἰσάγεται γοῦν παρά τινι τῶν ἐκ τοῦ θείου χοροῦ ἡ σοφία περὶ αὐτῆς λέγουσα τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον·'ὁ θεὸς ἐκτήσατό με πρωτίστην τῶν ἑαυτοῦ ἔργων, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ αἰώνος ἐθεμελίωσέ με·' ἦν γὰρ ἀναγκαῖον τῆς μητρὸς καὶ

> Thus in the pages of one of the inspired company, wisdom is represented as speaking of herself after this manner: "God obtained me first of all his works, and founded me before the ages" (Prov 8:22). True, for it was necessary that all that came to the birth of creation should be younger than the mother and nurse of the All.

Philo comes extremely close here to Plato's conception of a Father, Mother, Child triad of supreme principles later echoed by the Sethian Father-Mother-Child triad, although he does not actually name such a triad. But Philo also considers Sophia as the Mother of God's eldest Son, the Logos, the image and shadow of God, the place of the Ideas (κόσμος νόητος).[31] According to Dillon, this apparent duplication in the

τιθήνης τῶν ὅλων πάνθ' ὅσα εἰς γένεσιν ἦλθεν εἶναι νεώτερα· cf. *Conf.* 49.5 where Sophia is the nurse and mother of the wise man. According to "The Worse attacks the Better" (*Quod det.* 115-116) "the wisdom of God is the nourisher and nurse and foster mother (τὴν τροφὸν καὶ τιθηνοκόμον καὶ κουροτρόφον) of all who yearn for imperishable sustenance, having become as it were mother of those in the world immediately offering those born from her nourishment from herself" a nourishment called Manna, identified as the Logos. In *Ebr.* 30-31 the demiurge is God the Father of the cosmos and the mother is his ἐπιστήμη who receives the divine seed and gives birth to the sense-perceptible son, this cosmos (the other being the κόσμος νοητός; cf. also *Heres.* 52 and *Plant.* 14 of αἴσθησις, and *Conf.* 49 of Sophia). In *Fuga* 109, the high-priestly Logos is said to be the offspring of God the Father and Sophia the Mother (compared to νοῦς and αἴσθησις) through whom the universe came to be (δι' ἧς τὰ ὅλα ἦλθεν εἰς γένεσιν), much like Varro's Athena (see above, p. 347). Thus Sophia can be conceived not only as the maternal source of the Logos, but also can bear designations similar to those given by Plato to his receptacle, the mother and nurse of becoming, which later Platonists, perhaps even Plato himself, identified with the unlimited dyad. While the dyad as an image of matter is something of a topos in Philo, the identification of Sophia as the Platonic receptacle and mother of the Logos is rather more exceptional in his corpus, as noted by D. T. RUNIA (*Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* [2 vols., Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1983], 1.248): Philo "was indeed conversant with this part of the dialogue [*Timaeus* 48-53], but ... on the whole he makes remarkably little use of the section in which Plato fills in what was left unsaid concerning the pre-existent chaos at [*Timaeus*] 30a."

31. *Spec. Leg.* III.180; *Somn.* II.70; *Ebr.* 30-31; cf. *Fuga* 109; *Det.* 115-116. Such notions are present in other Jewish wisdom materials, most notably Wisdom 7:22-8:1, a late first-century BCE text that applies to Sophia a number of attributes, many of them of Stoic and Platonic provenance, that figure prominently in later gnostic and Neoplatonic characterizations of the feminine principle. Sophia is an all-pervading motion, a breath and effluence of the divine power and glory, a reflection of eternal light, a mirror of the divine activity, an image of the divine goodness, and so on; she renews all things while abiding (μένειν, cf. the Neoplatonic idea of permanence, μονή) in herself as one, yet she extends (διατείνει) from limit to limit

instrumental role of Sophia and the Logos is not "complete incoherence in Philo's thought, so much as a tension between the concepts of Sophia and the Logos, which potentially fulfill very much the same cosmogonic role."[32]

Philo's Logos has a double role: On the one hand, it is the archetypal idea of ideas, the paradigm or blueprint from which the perceptible world (αἰσθητος κόσμος) is formed. On the other hand, there are passages (*Heres* 129-132; *Vita Mosis* II.127) where Philo also considers the Logos to be the very instrument (ὄργανον) through which the utterly transcendent God, like Plato's ultimate maker and father, creates the world. This Logos has two levels, a higher one as the place of the paradigmatic ideas, and a lower, demiurgic level, occupied by the images of those ideas which constitute the perceptible world.[33] For Philo, these

(περάς) and governs (διοίκει) all things (see passages cited at the beginning of Chapter 6).

32. J. DILLON, "Female Principles in Platonism," in *IDEM*, *The Golden Chain* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum Publications, 1990), IV-107–IV-123, here IV-118.

33. As D. T. RUNIA (*Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*, 1.373-376) has pointed out, Philo's Logos replaces Plato's cosmic soul as the representation of God's immanent presence in the world, largely under the influence of his Middle Platonic environment which had accepted the Stoic transmutation of Plato's cosmic soul into their all-pervading Logos. Although in the *de Opificio*, Philo tends to restrict the function of the Logos to merely serving as the place of the ideas (the noetic cosmos), there are passages in other treatises according to which the Logos functions at two levels: 1) that of the demiurgic mind containing the paradigm of all things, and 2) that of the cosmic soul, where it is present in the sense-perceptible world, and performs the demiurgic function of dividing and shaping matter according to the numbers and proportions it contains as images of the ultimate principles. As "cutter" (λόγος τομεύς, *Heres.* 129-236) God uses the Logos to divide the disordered and disharmonious pre-elemental matter into the elements according to number, proportion, and perfect shapes. This ensures the harmonious distribution of the elements and the permanence of the world, just as the demiurge of the *Timaeus* (30A, 53A-B) orders the primal chaos by means of shapes and numbers, particularly those associated with the elementary triangles. Having divided all sensible entities to the point of indivisibility, the Logos passes on to distinguish even the objects of reason into equal and opposite qualities (true/false, rational/irrational, etc.; *Heres* 131-132). Thus the Logos seems to consist of two levels, a transcendent one which is the noetic cosmos containing the ideas corresponding to Plato's paradigm, and an immanent one, which is demiurgic, shaping unformed and infinitely divisible matter according to the numbers and geometrical entities and proportions which it itself contains as images of those paradigmatic ideas. According to *Vita Mosis* II.127, "The Logos is double (διττός) in both the universe and in human nature; in its universal aspect, it is concerned with the incorporeal and paradigmatic forms (περὶ

images turn out to be numbers. As images of transcendent principles, numbers thus make those principles indirectly present for the formation of physical reality.

Ultimate principles, such as God and perhaps Sophia as God's knowledge, or even pre-existent Matter, clearly transcend the Logos and the Forms or ideas resident therein. But they have an image within the lower, immanent level of the Logos, in the form of numbers such as the monad, dyad, triad and so on, while the transcendent level of the Logos is the place of the paradigmatic ideas alone. Then comes the perceptible cosmos. Each lower level is the image (εἰκών) of the one immediately above it. Perhaps we are to conceive numbers as a kind of intermediate entity, incorporeal like the ideas, yet, unlike the ideas, capable of being combined into numerical ratios and measures of the geometrical structures that serve as patterns for corporeal realities.[34]

τῶν ἀσωμάτων καὶ παραδειγματικῶν ἰδεῶν) from which the noetic cosmos (νοητὸς κόσμος) arises and in another aspect it is concerned with the visible things which are copies and images of the ideas (περὶ τῶν ὁρατῶν, ἃ δὴ μιμήματα καὶ ἀπεικονίσματα τῶν ἰδεῶν), from which the sensible world (αἰσθητος κόσμος) was produced; in mankind, it is on the one hand interior (ἐνδιάθετος) and on the other hand outwardly expressed (προφορικός), the one like a spring (πηγή) from which flows the other as produced by the former."

34. It may be that Philo conceived of the relation between ideas and numbers, which seem to be located in two respective levels of the Logos, his equivalent of the cosmic soul, in a way similar to that held in the Old Academy. According to Aristotle (*Met.* I.6.987b4-988a16, XIII.6.1080b1-36) in addition to the paradigmatic ideas, Plato postulated the existence of certain "mathematicals," to be distinguished from the ideas by being "combinable with each other" and having "many the same," and from physical objects by being eternal and incorporeal. While the ideas exist in their own separate realm, DILLON (*The Middle Platonists*, 6-29) thinks that the mathematicals are to be localized in the cosmic soul. According to Aristotle (*de Anima* 429a7), Plato called the soul the place (τόπος) of the ideas, which receives the ideas into itself and transforms them into mathematicals, projecting them upon matter to produce the physical world. According to Dillon, other testimonies from Aristotle show that Plato's successors played with such notions as well. In general, the Old Academy seems to have conceived a hierarchy of incorporeal entities below the ultimate principles: first, the ideal forms (which some may have conceived to include ideal numbers as well) sometimes conceived as a divine Mind, and then, at the level of the cosmic soul, mathematical (and perhaps geometrical) entities in Aristotle's (*Physics* 219b6) sense of the abstract numbers of calculation (ἀριθμοὶ ἀριθμητοί rather than the numbers of enumeration ἀριθμοὶ ἀριθμουμένοι), or, in modern parlance, mathematical sets. Cf. the distinction between the monad as an intelligible idea and the one (ἕν) as the countable object in Theon of Smyrna, *Ex-*

Old Academy	Philo
One ↔ Unlimited dyad	God ↔ Sophia (or Matter?)
paradigm (ideal numbers)	transcendent logos (ideas)
world soul (mathematicals)	immanent logos (numbers)
perceptible world	perceptible world

Philo's ontology resembles the Old Academic structure of two complementary principles, except for his introduction of the term λόγος as elder son of God and the place of the ideas, and his positing the supreme God as a unique principle at the summit of the hierarchy. Philo's theological and ontological monism can be generally credited to his Jewish monotheism and the influence of contemporary Neopythagoreans.[35] It is of course a departure from the rather traditionally dualist Old Academic scheme of two opposed primal principles, the One and a principle of multiplicity at the summit of the ontological hierarchy, a move preparing the way for the Neoplatonic doctrine of the One beyond all being and definition. Yet on numerous occasions, Philo reflects the older Academic scheme when he portrays Sophia as God's consort and Mother of the All at the second highest level of reality. As her Son, the Logos is the principal articulator and place of the ideas (conceived principally as numbers and measures), subsuming the role not only of the Old Academic Limit and Unlimited, but also of the Forms themselves as well as

positio p. 19,18-22 Hiller: "And so the intelligible idea of the One is the Monad, which is indivisible. And the one existing uniquely among perceptibles is called One, as in one horse, one human being. Thus the Monad would be Principle of the Numbers on the one hand and One the principle of numerable things, and the One as among perceptibles (καὶ μονὰς τοίνυν ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἰδέα ἡ νοητή, ἥ ἐστιν ἄτομος· ἓν δὲ τὸ ἐν αἰσθητοῖς καθ' ἑαυτὸ λεγόμενον, οἷον εἷς ἵππος, εἷς ἄνθρωπος. ὥστ' εἴη ἂν ἀρχὴ τῶν μὲν ἀριθμῶν ἡ μονάς, τῶν δὲ ἀριθμητῶν τὸ ἕν· καὶ τὸ ἓν ὡς ἐν αἰσθητοῖς)." The Neopythagorean interpretation of the Old Academic two-opposed principles is classically expressed in the sketch from Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* X.276-278 cited above on p. 353.

35. Logos is applied at two levels: the transcendent Logos corresponds to the Ideas or mathematicals, and the immanent Logos to the World Soul. Philo's supreme triad of God, Monad and Dyad is exactly similar to the first century BCE Neopythagorean doctrine of Eudorus, who posited a supreme One above the Academic opposed principles of the One and the Dyad, as their source and causes of their interaction (Simplicius, *in Phys.* 9.181,10-30). In essence, this amounts to reintroducing the figure of the *Philebus*' fourth cause, the divine Intelligence, and identifying it as a superior One located at a level beyond that of the erstwhile first and second causes, Limit and Unlimited.

that of the demiurgical Intelligence. As a result, Philo can conflate the figures of Mother and Son as well as distinguish them; in this sense, he vacillates between a three and a four level metaphysics.[36] In addition, Philo is disturbed by the gender of Sophia's name, and on the grounds of her more masculine function of educating humans, would prefer to consider her as a masculine father (*Fuga* 50), but he cannot completely escape the influence of the Jewish tradition of the femininity of Wisdom nor the Pythagorean tradition of the femininity of the Dyad.

III. Middle Platonism

One of the hallmarks of Middle Platonism is a theology that locates two or three Gods, conceived as Intellects, at the top of the ontological hierarchy. There is a transcendent first God in complete repose who is solely occupied with self-intellection, broadly modeled on the Good beyond being of *Republic* VI (509B) and the One beyond being of the *Parmenides* (137C-142A). Below this, there is a second God in motion who is oriented both above in contemplation of the first God and below as the active (perhaps on the analogy of the Stoic divine Logos) force in the lower cosmos, demiurgically occupied with its management.[37] Sometimes, as in Numenius, these two functions of the second God are respectively assigned to a second and third God. The prominence of the cosmic soul as a fully rational and independent entity in the doctrine of Plato and the Old Academy tends to be diminished in many Middle Platonic thinkers. While it tends to survive as an independent entity in Alcinous, Atticus, Apuleius, and perhaps Moderatus, these thinkers begin to reckon with an irrational component in the world soul, perhaps already intimated by passages in Plato's *Statesman* (269C-274D) and *Laws* X 896D-E. While these tend to merge this irrational component with the lower aspect of the cosmic soul, others, such as Plutarch and Numenius, can even sunder the cosmic soul into a separate rational soul and an opposing principle of irrationality. In these systems, sometimes Plato's demiurge becomes the supreme Intellect and repository of the Forms, and the cosmic soul his active *logos*, while Matter takes on the features of an irrational cosmic soul, and in other cases, the demiurge is

36. The distinction of H. J. Krämer discussed in Chapter 1, p. 29 f.

37. Thus Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 46.

preserved as a secondary creator god below the supreme Intellect, and the cosmic soul takes on the role of a material principle.

A. Moderatus of Gades

Moderatus of Gades (fl. 80-90 CE),[38] is a key figure in the development of Neopythagorean Middle Platonism, in that he all but sketches out the metaphysical scheme of Plotinus a century in advance. Moderatus' teaching is reconstructed by Dillon on the basis of teaching attributed to him by Porphyry and Stobaeus.[39] According to these sources, Moderatus posited a four-level metaphysics based on the Old Academy ("Plato") and the Pythagoreans:[40]

38. A disciple of his, Lucius, met Plutarch in Rome, Plutarch *Qaest. conv.* 8.7-8.

39. Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.* 48-53 and "On Matter" *apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.230,34-231,27 Diels; Stobaeus, *Anth.* 1.21 Wachsmuth. See Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 344-351.

40. Moderatus *apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.230,34-231,27 [Diels], translated by P. Merlan in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (ed. A. H. Armstrong; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 91-92: [p. 230 Diels]: Ταύτην δὲ περὶ τῆς ὕλης τὴν ὑπόνοιαν ἐοίκασιν ἐσχηκέναι πρῶτοι μὲν τῶν Ἑλλήνων οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι, μετὰ δ' ἐκείνους ὁ Πλάτων, ὡς καὶ Μοδέρατος ἱστορεῖ. οὗτος γὰρ κατὰ τοὺς Πυθαγορείους τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἓν ὑπὲρ τὸ εἶναι καὶ πᾶσαν οὐσίαν ἀποφαίνεται, τὸ δὲ δεύτερον ἕν, ὅπερ ἐστὶ [p. 231 Diels] τὸ ὄντως ὂν καὶ νοητόν, τὰ εἴδη φησὶν εἶναι, τὸ δὲ τρίτον, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τὸ ψυχικόν, μετέχειν τοῦ ἑνὸς καὶ τῶν εἰδῶν, τὴν δὲ ἀπὸ τούτου τελευταίαν φύσιν τὴν τῶν αἰσθητῶν οὖσαν μηδὲ μετέχειν, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἔμφασιν ἐκείνων κεκοσμῆσθαι, τῆς ἐν αὐτοῖς ὕλης τοῦ μὴ ὄντος πρώτως ἐν τῷ ποσῷ ὄντος οὔσης σκίασμα καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον ὑποβεβηκυίας καὶ ἀπὸ τούτου. καὶ ταῦτα δὲ ὁ Πορφύριος ἐν τῷ δευτέρῳ Περὶ ὕλης τὰ τοῦ Μοδεράτου παρατιθέμενος γέγραφεν ὅτι "βουληθεὶς ὁ ἐνιαῖος λόγος, ὥς πού φησιν ὁ Πλάτων, τὴν γένεσιν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ τῶν ὄντων συστήσασθαι, κατὰ στέρησιν αὐτοῦ ἐχώρησε [mss.; ἐχώριζε conj. Zeller, Festugière] τὴν ποσότητα πάντων αὐτὴν στερήσας τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων καὶ εἰδῶν. τοῦτο δὲ ποσότητα ἐκάλεσεν ἄμορφον καὶ ἀδιαίρετον καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον, ἐπιδεχομένην μέντοι μορφὴν σχῆμα διαίρεσιν ποιότητα πᾶν τὸ τοιοῦτον. ἐπὶ ταύτης ἔοικε, φησί, τῆς ποσότητος ὁ Πλάτων τὰ πλείω ὀνόματα κατηγορῆσαι 'παν̓δεχῆ' καὶ ἀνείδεον λέγων καὶ 'ἀόρατοῦ' καὶ 'ἀπορώτατα τοῦ νοητοῦ μετειληφέναι' αὐτὴν καὶ 'λογισμῷ νόθῳ μόλις ληπτήν' καὶ πᾶν τὸ τούτοις ἐμφερές. αὕτη δὲ ἡ ποσότης, φησί, καὶ τοῦτο τὸ εἶδος τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν τοῦ ἐνιαίου λόγου νοούμενον τοῦ πάντας τοὺς λόγους τῶν ὄντων ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιειληφότος παραδείγματά ἐστι τῆς τῶν σωμάτων ὕλης, ἣν καὶ αὐτὴν ποσὸν καὶ τοὺς Πυθαγορείους καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα καλεῖν ἔλεγεν, οὐ τὸ ὡς εἶδος ποσόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ κατὰ στέρησιν καὶ παράλυσιν καὶ ἔκτασιν καὶ διασπασμὸν καὶ διὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος παράλλαξιν, δι' ἃ καὶ κακὸν δοκεῖ ἡ ὕλη ὡς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀποφεύγουσα. καὶ καταλαμβάνεται ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξελθεῖν τῶν ὅρων οὐ συγχωρεῖται, τῆς μὲν

It seems that this opinion concerning Matter was held first among Greeks by the Pythagoreans, and after them by Plato, as indeed Moderatus relates. For, following the Pythagoreans, [Plato] declares that the first One is above being and all essence, while the second One, i.e. the truly existent and object of intellection, he says is the Forms. The third, i.e. the psychic, participates in the One and the Forms, while the final nature, i.e. the sensible, does not even participate, but is ordered by reflection from those [the Forms = second One? both the first and second Ones?], since Matter in the perceptible realm is a shadow of Non-being as it appears primally in quantity, and which is inferior in degree even to that (non-being).

And in the second book of *On Matter* Porphyry, citing from Moderatus, has also written that the Unitary Logos, as Plato somewhere [*Timaeus* 29D7-30A6] says, intending to produce from itself the origin of beings, by self-deprivation made room for [conj. Zeller, Festugière: "separated from itself"] Quantity (ποσότης), having deprived itself of all its (the Logos') proportions and Forms. He [Plato] called this Quantity (ποσότης) shapeless, undifferentiated and formless, but receptive of shape, form, differentiation, quality etc. It is this Quantity (ποσότης), he says, to which Plato apparently applies various predicates, speaking of the "all receiver" and calling it "formless," even "invisible" and "least capable of participating in the intelligible" and "barely graspable by spurious reasoning" and everything similar to such predicates. This Quantity (ποσότης), he says, and this Form (*sic.*) conceived as a privation of the Unitary Logos which contains in itself all proportions of beings, are paradigms (*sic.*) of corporeal Matter which itself, he says, was called quantity (ποσόν) by Pythagoreans and Plato, not in the sense of quantity (ποσόν) as a Form, but in the sense of privation, paralysis, extension and disarray, and because of its deviation from that which is—which is why Matter seems to be evil, as it flees from the good. And (this Matter) is caught by it (the Unitary Logos) and not permitted to overstep its boundaries, as extension receives the proportion of ideal magnitude and is bounded by it, and as disarray is rendered eidetic by numerical distinction. So, according to this exposition, Matter is nothing else but a turning away of perceptible species from intelligible ones, as the former turn away from there and are borne downwards towards non-being.

ἐκτάσεως τὸν τοῦ εἰδητικοῦ μεγέθους λόγον ἐπιδεχομένης καὶ τούτῳ ὁριζομένης, τοῦ δὲ διασπασμοῦ τῇ ἀριθμητικῇ διακρίσει εἰδοποιουμένου. ἔστιν οὖν ἡ ὕλη κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ ἡ τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν πρὸς τὰ νοητὰ παράλλαξις παρατραπέντων ἐκεῖθεν καὶ πρὸς τὸ μὴ ὂν ὑποφερομένων. *Pace* the penetrating remarks of Westerink in H. D. SAFFREY and L. WESTERINK in *Proclus: Théologie Platonicienne, Livre II* (Collection des universités de France; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1974), xxxi-xxxv (following E. Zeller; see n. 50 below), I see no reason why Porphyry's citation from Simplicius should not accurately reflect Moderatus' actual beliefs.

The supreme principle is the first One, beyond being and all essence. This is followed by a second One, who is true being, intelligible (νοητόν) and is the forms (εἴδη). Below these are the cosmic soul, the sensible world of nature, and finally unordered matter. Ontogenesis begins, not with the First One, but on a secondary level, with a prefigurative state of the second One prior to its full determination as the truly existent object of intellection, comparable to Plotinus' Intellect.[41] This prefigurative state of the second One is called the unitary (i.e. transcendent) Logos containing the ratios (λόγοι) of beings and the paradigms of bodies. By an act of self-retraction, the unitary Logos deprives itself of its own unitary elements, apparently giving rise to the "first One," who then transcends it as the supreme principle and paradigm, the source of unity, limitation, and proportion. In this act the Monad makes room for the "primal Quantity" (ποσότης), the primal non-being that was already present within or alongside it, perhaps as an indefinite dyad or intelligible matter without limit or measure or determination (like the τἆλλα of the third hypothesis of the *Parmenides* 157B-159B). This primal Quantity (ποσότης)—clearly Moderatus' equivalent of Plato's indefinite Dyad—is a prefiguration of the corporeal quantity (ποσόν) derived from it by privation of all traces of unity and form, yielding the pure multiplicity and extension underlying corporeal things which must be bounded and formed by the ideal magnitude and numerical distinction that the unitary Logos has given up, probably to the "first One."

Thereupon, the numerical distinction of this Quantity by the first One serves as the origin of "beings," probably the perceptible bodies of the sensible realm that have quantity (ποσόν) and magnitude.[42] In order to generate determinate being, this indefinite material or Quantity must be limited by form, but the unitary Logos first has to deprive itself of all traces of its unitariness in order to admit or make room for Quantity, in

41. See G. BECHTLE, *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Berner Reihe philosophischer Studien 22; Bern: Verlag Paul Haupt, 1999), 107-111; 218-219.

42. A similar notion is attested by Calcidius (*In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* 293 = Numenius frg. 52 des Places): *Sed non nullo Pythagoreos vim sententiae non recte assecutos putasse dici etiam illam indeterminatam et immensam duitatem ab unica singularitate institutam recedente a natura sua singularitate et in duitatis abitum migrante—non recte, ut quae erat singularitas esse desineret, quae non erat duitas susisteret, atque ex deo silva et ex singularitate immensa et indeterminata duitas converteretur.*

which act it becomes formless and shapeless itself, an "all-receiver" like Plato's Receptacle becoming. It makes room for this Quantity by depriving itself (perhaps by subtraction or contraction) of all the proportions and forms (i.e., unitary forms like the ideal numbers) that it contains. Perhaps the unitary Logos itself gives rise to this Quantity, a primal principle of absolute Non-being, from the mere plurality of the unitary forms of whose unitariness it has deprived itself, allowing the indefinite dyad (already seminally present in the Logos) to increase its part in the unitary Logos by the latter's retraction of unitary elements from itself. Presumably the unity that goes away from the unitary logos according to its self-withdrawal even gives rise to the first One which is beyond being.[43] There now remains only the potential for form or measure (the "privated" unitary Logos) which somehow "catches" primal Quantity that yet remains in the unitary Logos and limits or renders it "eidetic by the numerical distinction", thus giving rise to the second One as the realm of being, form and intellect. This would correspond to the typical Pythagorean way of explaining the generation of things by the action of a monad (the unitary Logos) acting with or on a dyad, while the first One is separated from all else would not be directly involved in the genesis of being and intellect.

According to Stobaeus (*Anthologium* I, p. 8,1-9,9), Moderatus conceived the Monad or second One as the formal principle that limits primal Quantity (περαίνουσι ποσότης). The Monad is what remains (μονή) and is stable after the subtraction of each number in turn from Multiplicity (similar to Speusippus' principle of Multiplicity, itself an adaptation of Plato's indefinite Dyad bearing properties of the Receptacle of the *Timaeus*).[44]

43. A similar scheme seems to underlie the *Chaldaean Oracles*, where the Father takes himself away with himself his own fire or hypostatic identity, leaving only his power and intellect to form the paternal or second intellect.

44. Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I p. 8,1-9,9: Ἔστι δὲ ἀριθμός, ὡς τύπῳ εἰπεῖν, σύστημα μονάδων, ἢ προποδισμὸς πλήθους ἀπὸ μονάδος ἀρχόμενος καὶ ἀναποδισμὸς εἰς μονάδα καταλήγων, Μονάδες δὲ περαίνουσι ποσότης, ἥ τις μειουμένου τοῦ πλήθους κατὰ τὴν ὑφαίρεσιν παντὸς ἀριθμοῦ στερηθεῖσα μονήν τε καὶ στάσιν λαμβάνει· περαιτέρω γὰρ ἡ μονὰς τῆς ποσότητος οὐκ ἰσχύει ἀναποδίζειν· ὥστε μονὰς ἤτοι ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑστάναι καὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὡσαύτως ἄτρεπτος μένειν, ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ διακεκρίσθαι καὶ παντελῶς μεμονῶσθαι τοῦ πλήθους εὐλόγως ἐκλήθη. Cf. the close parallel in Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio* 18,3-20,11 Hiller.

> In brief, number is a collection of monads, or a progression of multiplicity beginning from a monad, and reversion terminating at the monad. Monads delimit Quantity, which is whatever has been deprived and is left remaining and stable when multiplicity is diminished by the subtraction of each number. For a monad does not have the power to revert further than quantity; so that truly a monad is appropriately named from its being stable and remaining unchangeably the same, or from being distinct and completely isolated from multiplicity. (Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I, p. 8,1-11)

This seems to be an adaptation of the Old Pythagorean derivation of the number One according to which the Unlimited (ἀπειρία) is drawn or breathed in and limited by Limit, except here the limiting principle draws in or contracts itself.[45] Here the function of Limit is called subtraction. Moderatus seems to have associated this second level not only with the generation of numbers, but also with an elementary notion of emanation, conceiving the Monad as a permanence (μονή) from which Multiplicity[46] generates a system of monads or ideal numbers by a progression (προποδισμός) from and a return (ἀναποδισμός) to the Monad.[47]

Stobaeus' first excerpt from Moderatus is immediately followed by what (at least according to the parallel passage in Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio* 18,3-20,11 Hiller) may be another citation of Moderatus, in this case distinguishing between numbers as distinct but indivisible formal entities and the countable numbers of quantities and calculation (cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 219b6):[48]

45. Aristotle, *Met.* XIV 1091a13-19: οἱ μὲν οὖν Πυθαγόρειοι ... φανερῶς γὰρ λέγουσιν ὡς τοῦ ἑνὸς συσταθέντος εἴτ' ἐξ ἐπιπέδων εἴτ' ἐκ χροιᾶς εἴτ' ἐκ σπέρματος εἴτ' ἐξ ὧν ἀποροῦσιν εἰπεῖν εὐθὺς τὸ ἔγγιστα τοῦ ἀπείρου ὃ εἴλκετο καὶ ἐπεραίνετο ὑπὸ τοῦ πέρατος.

46. Here in the sense of eidetic multiplicity, rather than in Speusippus' sense of the Indefinite Dyad, which approximates Moderatus' notion of pure, formless quantity.

47. Cf. the Neoplatonic Monê, Proodos, and Epistrophê and the function of the Sethian "Triple Power" discussed in Chapter 12.

48. Τινὲς τῶν ἀριθμῶν ἀρχὴν ἀπεφήναντο τὴν μονάδα, τῶν δὲ ἀριθμητῶν ἀρχὴν τὸ ἕν. Τοῦτο δὲ σῶμα τεμνόμενον εἰς ἄπειρον· ὥστε τὰ ἀριθμητὰ τῶν ἀριθμῶν ταύτῃ διαλλάττειν, ᾗ διαφέρει τὰ σώματα τῶν ἀσωμάτων. Εἰδέναι δὲ καὶ τοῦτο χρή, ὅτι τῶν ἀριθμῶν εἰσηγήσαντο τὰς ἀρχὰς οἱ μὲν νεώτεροι τήν τε μονάδα καὶ τὴν δυάδα, οἱ δὲ Πυθαγορικοὶ πάσας παρὰ τὸ ἑξῆς τὰς τῶν ὅρων ἐκθέσεις, δι' ὧν ἄρτιοί τε καὶ περιττοὶ νοοῦνται (i.e., the dyad is principle of two things, the triad of three things, etc.).

> Some declare the principle of numbers to be the monad, while the principle of enumerable things is the one. The latter entity can be infinitely divided, so that enumerables are different from numbers in the same way that corporeals differ from incorporeals. One must also realize that, while more recent thinkers (e.g., Plato) posited the principles of numbers to be the monad and dyad, the Pythagoreans posited all the principles as the sequential series of terms through which even and odd are conceived. (Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I, p. 9,2-9)

Stobaeus also says that Moderatus distinguished between numbers as distinct but indivisible formal entities and the countable numbers of quantities and calculation[49] such that the monad, dyad, etc. are conceived as ideal entities, "ideal numbers," which define pure quantity or extension by delineating it (or according to Porphyry's testimony, "rendering it eidetic by numerical distinction") into groups or sets of countable objects.

Thus ideal magnitude seems to have two moments, a systolic and a diastolic, the one a contraction of ideal multiplicity to its limit in the Monad to produce unformed quantity, and the other a generation of ideal numbers from the Monad that increasingly delineates indefinite quantity into the determinate mathematical objects (ratios, proportions) that will form the content of the cosmic soul.[50]

A similar process is described in the Platonizing Sethian treatises. The emergence of the Barbelo Aeon from the Invisible Spirit as a projection or shadow of the One presented in *Zostrianos* and the *Three Steles of Seth* (VIII 78,6-84,1 and VII 122,1-34 respectively) is closely parallel to Moderatus' account of the emergence of Quantity from the second One: a self-privation of the unitary source results in the emergence of a receptacle of becoming that forms a place for the discrete multiplicity arising from the intellectual delimitation of indefinite continuity; matter is a shadow cast by the non-being existing primally in quantity. The process is even more explicit in *Allogenes*:

> **XI 45** [22] For after it (the Barbelo Aeon) [contracted], [23] [it expanded] and [24] [spread out] and became complete, [25] [and] it was empowered [with] [26] all of them, by knowing [itself] [27] [in the perfect Invisible Spirit]. [28] And it [became] [29] [an] aeon who knows [herself] [30] [because] she knew that one.

49. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 219b6.

50. Cf. the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* 224.34 [Rehm]: κατὰ γάρ ἔκτασιν καὶ συστολὴν ἡ μονὰς δυὰς εἶναι νομίζεται.

By whatever channels, Moderatus' doctrine of divine emanation through self-privation or self-contraction and subsequent expansion constitutes an important source for the emanative doctrine of these Sethian treatises.

Moderatus' third "One" is psychical and participates in the One and the Ideas; it is the equivalent of the World Soul, which would presumably contain actual numbers and geometricals. Last comes Matter, conceived as the lower shadow cast by the primal Non-being, which seems to be a principle opposed to the unitary Logos first manifested as Quantity by a privation of its eidetic power.

In this scheme, a material principle exists at every level except the highest: 1) at the level of the second One as 1) the primal Non-being and Quantity or Multiplicity left over from the self-privation of the unitary Logos, and 2) probably at the level of the third, psychic level (which Moderatus characterized as Number) where Matter as extension is proportioned by the second One with ideal magnitude to form geometrical shapes, and disarray or dispersion is rendered as eidetic (determinate) number by numerical distinction. At a still lower level, 3) matter is apparently impressed with those shapes and numerical proportions to produce objects of the subjacent sensible realm of Nature, and finally 4) in the form of its remainder at the lowest level, matter is a shadow of Non-being devoid of all shape, declining toward Non-being.

This is much like the system of Speusippus, in that one finds a material principle at every level except the first, and that at the second level, the ideal numbers or mathematicals are generated from the interaction of the principles of unity and of multiplicity. However, the differences are many: Speusippus allowed no principle beyond these two as does Moderatus in the case of his first One; Moderatus ascribes being to the monadic generator of numbers, which Speusippus is not likely to have done, and conceives the principle of multiplicity to be derived from the monadic second one, while for Speusippus the One and Multiplicity are coeval principles, neither one deriving from the other, and having nothing beyond them. Finally, although Speusippus allowed for a material principle at each level after the first, it is unclear whether or not he entertained the existence of multiple principles of unity beyond the primal One as Moderatus seems to, unless at each of his five spheres of being he presupposes the existence of something analogous to the one, as he seems to imply by the function of the "point" in the realm of the geometricals.

By positing a sole transcendent first principle, Moderatus not only seems to elaborate a metaphysics found already in Eudorus of Alexandria, but also exhibits a nearly peremptory anticipation of Plotinus' three "hypostases." Though explicitly present only at the second and lowest ontological levels, there seems to be a feminine material principle implicitly present at every level except the highest. At the second level, the ideal numbers or mathematicals are generated from the interaction of the principles of unity and of sheer Quantity, and form the content of the psychic realm, which Moderatus, like Xenocrates, called Number, as that which "comprises proportions" (*apud* Iamblichus in Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.32,31-49 Hense = 1.364 Wachsmuth). At the lowest level, one finds a residue of evil, a shadow of non-being existing primally as sheer quantity, which results from the gradual privation of the ordering power of the One at ever lower levels of the ontological scale.

The whole process seems to be an elaboration of the Platonic and the Old Academic doctrine of the generation of Forms from the One and the unlimited Dyad of the Great and the Small, and of the generation of sensible things from the Forms (as determinate measures) and the Dyad. This is clearly the doctrine of principles utilized in the *Philebus*, where they are called Limit and the Unlimited. What is new here is the generation of the dyadic principle of quantity from the Monad in its prefigurative state, conceived as a "unitary Logos." Rather than actively imposing limit on the Unlimited (the Great and the Small, the More and Less), as seems to be the case in the Old Academic scheme, the Monad seems to give rise to a supreme One as a stable, inactive and inert permanence, rather more as Plato envisions the role of the forms (the "Father" in *Timaeus* 48E-52D). Instead, it is only the Monad (unitary Logos) and Dyad that are active in the process on the second level, where the Monad initiates its own limitation and generates a system of monads.

In Neopythagorean fashion, one of Plato's two originally coeval opposite principles is now derived from the other, a novelty which Numenius (frg. 52 des Places: the indefinite dyad originated from single monad withdrawing from its nature and wandering into the condition of the dyad) later rejected, attributing it to Pythagoreans who misunderstood Plato. This development is the logical outcome of the pre-Philonic Neopythagorean postulation of a supreme One located beyond the level of the generative principles themselves (the Limit and Unlimited), first attested in the Pythagorean Memoirs quoted by Alexander Polyhistor

ca. 80 BCE (*apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* VIII,25-35),[51] followed by Eudorus of Alexandria ca. 30 BCE (*apud* Simplicius, *in Phys.* 9.181,10-30, cited above), and others.

Moderatus' doctrine of multiple principles of unity, as Dodds has shown,[52] seems to be informed by a conscious appropriation of the hypotheses of Plato's (the Pythagorean!) *Parmenides*: the One beyond being (137C-142A), the One which is (142B-145A), the One as one and many (145A-155E), the One as neither one nor many (155E-157B), things other than the One (157B-159B), and then the cases of the non-being of the One (160B-end). Not only is it probable that Moderatus appropriates the *Parmenides*, but it is also clear that he has effected an

51. Cited above, p. 353.

52. E. R. DODDS, "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928), 129-142. In their introduction to Volume Two of Proclus' *Platonic Theology* (*Proclus, Théologie Platonicienne, Livre* II [Collection des universités de France; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1974], xxx-xxxv), H. SAFFREY and L. WESTERINK argue that Moderatus' teaching derives not from an interpretation of the *Parmenides* but from a creative exegesis of the *Second Letter* (312E) in connection with readings from the *Republic* (VI 509B), *Philebus* (15A), and *Timaeus* (27C; 52D). In their view (following Zeller; cf., similarly, Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorinus* 1.166 and n. 1 there), the "three Ones" of Simplicius' report have been glossed by Porphyry (e.g., "the second One, which is truly being and intelligible"; "the third, which relates to Soul") and, consequently, follow the division of hypotheses attributed to Porphyry in Proclus' *In Parm.*, 1053,38-1054,37. Porphyry, in effect, altered Moderatus' teaching to fit his own system. But the negative theologies of the Middle Platonic sources referred to in this chapter's discussion (*infra*) of Alcinous demonstrate that this cannot be the case. As J. WHITTAKER has pointed out, the passages from Alcinous and Clement are mutually dependent upon a "theologically inclined Middle Platonic commentary upon," or "a Middle Platonic theologico-metaphysical adaptation of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*." The Middle Platonists did not in fact regard the *Parmenides* simply as a "logical exercise book." Therefore, they (and the Sethian treatises which are similarly dependent on common Middle Platonic sources) provide "incontestable proof of a pre-Plotinian theological interpretation of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, and they must be taken seriously into account when one weighs the value of Simplicius' [*In Phys.* 9.230,34-231,27 Diels] report (drawn from Porphyry) of a metaphysical interpretation on Neoplatonic lines of the first three Hypostases by the Platonist Moderatus in the first century after Christ" ("Philological Comments on the Neoplatonic Notion of Infinity," *The Significance of Neoplatonism* [ed. R. Baine Harris; Studies in Neoplatonism I; Norfolk, VA: International Society of Neoplatonic Studies, 1976], 155-172, esp. 156-159). À propos the curious *Second Letter*, Moderatus himself might be a good candidate for its author, having derived the "three kings" from his own interpretation of the *Parmenides*.

identification between the indefinite dyad or the Great and the Small of Plato's oral teaching, the principle of the Unlimited or the More and the Less of the *Philebus* 23C-26D, and the receptacle of the *Timaeus* 48E-52D, all now characterized as the sheer quantity produced by the "privation" or self-contraction of the One or "unitary logos."

The thought of Moderatus, sparsely attested as it is, is fundamental to the understanding not only of Plotinus but also of Sethian and Valentinian Gnosticism. His treatment of matter is profoundly present in Valentinian speculation on the origin of matter. Although the Sethian texts do not speculate extensively on the origin of lower matter, Moderatus' notion of emanation and the production and limitation of indefinite extension is basic to the Sethian view of the function of the Triple Powered One to be expounded in Chapter 12, and his concept of lower matter as a shadow appearing primally in quantity seems to be reflected in several Sethian texts. Aspects of Moderatus' view of both higher and lower matter and its generation are evident at many places in Plotinus: 1) his treatment of matter as a privation that is "caught" by intelligible reality; 2) his suggestion that lower matter is not entirely excluded from form; 3) his view that evil is not to be explained by a proactive cause, and 4) his view that evil is to be explained by the fall of matter as non-being or privation.

B. Plutarch of Cheironeia

Moderatus' contemporary, Plutarch of Cheironeia (ca. 45-120 CE) produced a number of metaphysical essays that seem to reflect a system similar to those of Moderatus and Philo. Like Moderatus, Plutarch refers to the supreme deity as the One or Monad. Yet while the supreme One of Moderatus is elevated above involvement with anything below it and seems to be produced from the self-privation of the second One (who is interpreted as the divine Intellect), Plutarch's One is a transcendent Mind or Logos which contains the Ideas as its thoughts, and is symbolized by the soul of Osiris.[53] To the One, Plutarch (*De defectu oraculorum* 428F) opposes the indefinite dyad, as the feminine element underlying all formlessness and disorder, identifying it not only with the Necessity (ἀνάγκη) of the *Timaeus* (48A, 56C, 68E) but also with what he understands to be the malificent soul of *Laws* X. But as Dillon points

53. I here follow DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, 199-224.

out, when he theologizes this, as in the *De Iside et Osiride* (369E), it is as a *male* principle: the Persian Ahriman or the Egyptian Seth-Typhon.[54]

What is new in Plutarch's scheme is the addition of a proactive evil psychic force responsible for irrational perturbations of the celestial realm, a Seth-Typhon figure antagonistic toward Osiris, the principle of order, but not sufficiently effective to destroy the prevailing celestial order. According to *De animae procreatione in Timaeo* (1014B-1015F), in the *Timaeus*, Plato had maintained the existence of primal matter in disordered motion as well as a certain shifting motion of the receptacle related to the "works of necessity"; but since all motion is caused by soul, there must therefore be a primal irrational soul responsible for this motion; further, since this ordered cosmos and its cosmic soul was not created from nothing, the demiurge must have imposed (numerical and geometrical) order on this pre-existing disordered matter and its soul, and so the cosmos is not eternal, but "has come to be" out of disorder.

Curiously, the introduction of an evil soul as a principle of evil opposing the supreme deity seems to entail the demotion of the feminine principle of the Receptacle, traditionally conceived to be coeval with the One, to the status of a third principle at a subordinate ontological level. Plutarch names this third principle Isis, who is both wisdom (φρόνησις) and Matter. Indeed, Plutarch characterizes Isis as a daemon, a kind of soul, while also identifying her as Plato's' receptacle of Ideas, nurse of becoming and the "all-receiving" one. She is identified as Plato's passive, material principle, eagerly receiving all procreation, who lovingly submits to Osiris, the masculine principle of order and form, although continually having to resist attack from the evil power.[55]

54. J. M. DILLON, "Female Principles in Platonism," in *IDEM.*, *The Golden Chain* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1990), IV-118.

55. Plutarch, *De Iside* 53, 372E-F: Ἡ γὰρ Ἰσίς ἐστι μὲν τὸ τῆς φύσεως θῆλυ καὶ δεκτικὸν ἁπάσης γενέσεως, καθὸ τιθήνη καὶ παιδεχὴς ὑπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος (*Tim.* 49A-51A), ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν πολλῶν μυριώνυμος κέκληται διὰ τὸ πάσας ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τρεπομένη μορφὰς δέχεσθαι καὶ ἰδέας. ἔχει δὲ σύμφυτον ἔρωτα τοῦ πρώτου καὶ κυριωτάτου πάντων, ὃ τἀγαθῷ ταὐτόν ἐστι, κἀκεῖνο ποθεῖ καὶ διώκει· τὴν δ' ἐκ τοῦ κακοῦ φεύγει καὶ διωθεῖται μοῖραν, ἀμφοῖν μὲν οὖσα χώρα καὶ ὕλη, ῥέπουσα δ' ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον καὶ παρέχουσα γεννᾶν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἐκείνῳ καὶ κατασπείρειν εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἀπορροὰς καὶ ὁμοιότητας, αἷς χαίρει καὶ γέγηθε κυισκομένη καὶ ὑποπιμπλαμένη τῶν γενέσεων. εἰκὼν γάρ ἐστιν οὐσίας <ἡ> ἐν ὕλῃ γένεσις καὶ μίμημα τοῦ ὄντος τὸ γινόμενον.

> Thus Isis is the female principle in nature and that which receives all procreation, and so she is called by Plato [*Timaeus* 49A, 51A] the nurse and all-receiving, and by most people "myriad-named," since she is turned about by the Logos to receive all shapes and forms. She has an innate love of the first and most sovereign principle of all, which is the same as the Good, and this she longs for and pursues, but the portion that lies with evil she tries to shun and reject, for she serves as space and matter for both of them, but she inclines of herself to what is better, offering herself to it for procreation, and for the sowing in herself of emanations and likenesses [cf. Speusippus' argument that the material principle cannot be evil since it is receptive of something praiseworthy]. In these she rejoices and is glad when she is impregnated with them and teems with these creations. For creation is an image of being in matter and an imitation of that which is. (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 372E-F)

Isis is a sort of irrational—not evil but ambivalent—world soul, modeled on Plato's Receptacle, who is closely associated with the rational and unambiguously good world soul, Osiris (*De Iside et Osiride* 371F-372E), but opposed to the evil soul Seth-Typhon. From Isis and the soul of Osiris is produced the lower Logos (symbolized by the body of Osiris), which contains the Ideas in their immanent aspect and thus constitutes the rational aspect of the World Soul. The World Soul is a Dyad composed of its rational aspect, the Logos, and its subrational aspect (symbolized by Isis), which, owing to contact with Matter, is disorderly and must be impregnated by the orderliness of the Logos. Yet Isis also can figure in a divine triad of Osiris, Isis, and Horus, understood as "the Intelligible (νοητόν), Matter (ὕλη), and the product of these, which the Greeks call the cosmos" which Plutarch identifies as the Paradigm, the Receptacle and the offspring of the *Timaeus* (50C-D), that is, Plato's Father-Mother-Child triad. Below these is the κόσμος αἰσθητός, the world of Nature (φύσις), symbolized by the younger Horus. On the other hand, given Plutarch's alternate identification of Isis with the irrational aspect of the cosmic soul and of the sensible world with Horus as the offspring of Isis and Osiris (as the Logos or rational cosmic soul), it seems as if Plutarch tends in effect to demote this entire implied family triad to the level of the World Soul, leaving as primal principles the supreme One and the evil dyadic principle Seth-Typhon. As Dillon observes,[56]

56. DILLON, "Female Principles in Platonism," IV-119.

> what we have is a triad of Logos, irrational World-Soul (acting as its matter), and physical world. Isis is, then, a significantly different figure from Sophia, and more than a step from her in the direction of Gnosticism.

This Horus begotten by Isis is the younger Horus, the sensible cosmos, to be distinguished from the elder Horus; as Dillon goes on to point out, at *De Iside et Osiride* 373B-C, Plutarch gives an allegory of "a composite Graeco-Egyptian myth" about the precosmic birth of Apollo (the elder Horus) as a kind of primal chaos from Isis and Osiris "while these gods were still in the womb of Rhea":[57]

> This means that "before this world was made visible and its rough material (ὕλη) was completely formed by the Logos, it was tested by nature (φύσει ἐλεγχομένον, whatever that really means), and brought forth of itself the first creation imperfect." This "first creation" is termed the elder Horus, and is said to have been born in darkness, a cripple—"a mere image and phantasm of the world that was to be." So Isis, it seems, produced a sort of foreshadowing of the cosmos on her own, before being filled with λόγοι by Osiris. For Plutarch, this only indicates her desire for Form and order, but it has a curious resemblance to Valentinus' myth [of the fall of Sophia].

Finally, while Plutarch adheres for the most part to a three-level ontology headed by two opposed principles, he also toyed with a four-level metaphysical hierarchy in which the summit of reality is occupied by a sole Monad who links primal stability to the realm of coming-to-be and passing away immediately below, which is presided over by a demiurgic Intellect.[58]

> There are four principles of all things: the first is of life, the second of motion, the third of generation, the last of decay: the first is linked to the second by the Monad at the invisible, the second to the third by Intellect at the sun, and the third to the fourth by Nature at the moon. A fate, daughter of Necessity holds the keys and presides over each link: over the first Atropos, over the second Clotho, and over the link at the moon Lachesis. (*De genio Socratis*, 591B)

Here, it seems that this supreme Monad is closely associated with a principle called "Life" which stands at the head of a descending series of feminine principles (Zoe, Kinesis, Genesis, Phthora) of change and becoming, a possible anticipation of Plotinus (see below) and another example of a feminine principle occupying levels of reality from the high-

57. *Ibid.*, IV-121.

58. Cf. H. J. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 98.

est on down. Clearly, Plutarch's metaphysics is highly original and occasionally contradictory; perhaps his overwhelming desire to insist that Plato believed that the world had a beginning in time was responsible for its somewhat fluid character.

This system is again much like the Old-Academic system of opposite first principles, but like Philo's, also employs the term Logos to represent the place of the transcendent paradigmatic Ideas in its upper aspect and of the immanent world-shaping Ideas or Forms in its lower aspect. Although Plutarch was active in Athens, and his teacher Ammonius (fl. 70-80 CE) in Rome, it is likely that similarities between the thought of Philo and Plutarch may owe to the influence of Ammonius, who may have studied in Alexandria or may also have encountered Pythagoreans such as Thrasyllos and Adrastos in first-century Rome. In any case, this Alexandrian Old-Academic and Neopythagorean metaphysics seems to have spread throughout the Mediterranean world, by the mid-first century CE.

C. Nicomachus of Gerasa

We next consider two Neopythagorean contemporaries of the second century, Nicomachus of Gerasa and Theon of Smyrna (fl. 100-150). On the basis of his two extant treatises (*Introduction to Arithmetic* and *Manual of Harmonics*) and two others extant in doxographical form (*Life of Pythagoras*, cited by Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, and <Iamblichus>, *Theologumena Arithmeticae*, ed. de Falco), Nicomachus exhibits the following system according to Dillon's reconstruction:[59]

59. *The Middle Platonists*, 352-361. See the eclectic summary in Photius, *Bibliotheca* 143a22-143b31 [in part]: τοιοῦτον ἡ τοῦ Γερασηνοῦ Νικομάχου Θεολογία.... Λέγει δὲ τὴν μονάδα ἄλλα τε οὐκ ὀλίγα τῶν πλασμάτων τῇ περὶ αὐτὴν ἀληθείᾳ καὶ τοῖς προσοῦσι φυσικοῖς ἰδιώμασι καταμιγνύς, καὶ ὡς νοῦς τε εἴη, εἶτα καὶ ἀρσενόθηλυς, καὶ θεός, καὶ ὕλη δέ πως, πάντα χρήματα μιγνὺς ὡς ἀληθῶς, καὶ πανδοχεὺς λοιπὸν καὶ χωρητικὴ καὶ χάος, σύγχυσις, σύγκρασις, ἀλαμπία, σκοτωδία, χάσμα, Τάρταρος... ἄξων τέ ἐστιν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἥλιος καὶ πυράλιος, καὶ Μορφὼ δὲ καὶ Ζανὸς πύργος, καὶ σπερματίτης λόγος .... Ἡ δὲ δυὰς τόλμα τέ ἐστιν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ὕλη, καὶ τῶν ἀνομοίων αἰτία, καὶ μεταίχμιον πλήθους καὶ μονάδος. Ἐκ συνθέσεώς τε καὶ κατακράσεως μόνη ἴσον ποιεῖ, διὸ καὶ ἴση. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄνισος καὶ ἔλλειψις, καὶ πλεονασμός, καὶ μόνη ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀόριστος, καὶ πειρος, ἀρχή τε ἀρτίου μόνη, καὶ οὐκ ἄρτιος, οὐ μὴν οὐδ' ἀρτιάκις ἀρτία. οὐδὲ περισσάρτιος, οὐδ' ἀρτιοπέριττος. Ἀλλὰ τούτων μὲν τὰ πλείω ἐγγύς ἐστι τῇ δυάδος φυσικῇ ἰδιότητι· ἃ δὲ τῆς τερατείας, πηγή ἐστι πάσης συμφωνίας. καὶ Μουσῶν ἡ Ἐρατώ, καὶ ἁρμονία, καὶ τλημοσύνη, καὶ ρίζα οὐ κατ' ἐνέργειάν

The supreme God is simply called the highest God. Next comes the first-born One, the Monad, a demiurgic Mind (τεχνικὸς νοῦς or θεός). This Mind encompasses all opposition and multiplicity since all numbers (each number being identified with various deities) potentially preexist in it as its ideas; it is potentially and seminally all things including Matter. By a process of self-doubling, the Monad gives rise to the Dyad of excess and deficiency, that is, matter in the proper sense, which is allreceiver of the σπερματίτης λόγος of the Monad. By virtue of its excess and deficiency the Dyad can also be called daring (τόλμα), Isis, and Rhea, but also Phanes, the first to appear. In some sense the Dyad is a "distance-mark" (κάμπτηρ), in which the Monad is both starting point and finishing point in the flowing forth and return of the rational principles (λόγοι) from and to the Monad, in what seems to be an elementary process of emanation and reversion.[60] In this way, physical bodies are formed in two phases: first the monad interacts with the indefinite dyad to produce the Forms (understood as numbers), and these in turn interact with matter to produce corporeal entities, a doctrine discussed in the previous chapter that according to Aristotle (*Metaphysics* I, 6)[61] goes back to Plato and which is reflected in Plato's *Philebus* (16C; 23C; 24A-26D).

Apparently the immanent aspect of these λόγοι is the Triad, a kind of immanent Logos or rational World Soul, which is symbolized by the three Fates. This triad symbolizes a threefold process of emanation: the emission (πρόησις) or sowing of the seminal λόγοι, their reception

πω, καὶ δύναμις, καὶ πόδες πολυπιδάκου Ἴδης, καὶ κορυφαί, καὶ Φάνης.... Ἡ δὲ τριάς ἐστι μὲν πρῶτος περισσὸς κατ' ἐνέργειαν, καὶ τέλειος πρῶτος, καὶ μεσότης, καὶ ἀναλογία· τήν τε τῆς μονάδος δύναμιν εἰς ἐνέργειαν καὶ ἐπέκτασιν προχωρεῖν ποιεῖ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ πρωτίστη, καὶ κυρίως μονάδων σύστημα. Εἶτα λοιπὸν ἐντεῦθεν αὐτοῖς πρὸς τὸ φυσιολογικὸν αἴρεται ὁ ἀριθμός· αἰτία τε γὰρ τοῦ τριχῇ διαστατοῦ, καὶ περατωτικὴ τῆς ἀπειρίας τῆς ἐν ἀριθμῷ, καὶ ὅμοιον, καὶ ταὐτόν, καὶ ὁμόλογον, καὶ ὡρισμένον. Ἀλλ' οὔπω ταῦτα φορτικά· τὰ δ' οὐχ ὅμοια. Καὶ νοῦς τις ἡ τριάς, καὶ εὐβουλίας καὶ συνέσεως αἰτία, καὶ γνῶσις. ἀριθμοῦ τὸ κυριώτατον, μουσικῆς τε πάσης κυρία καὶ σύστασις, καὶ γε καὶ γεωμετρίας ὅτι μάλιστα. Cf. this arithmology with that of *Marsanes* (X 32,5-33,9), cited in Chapter 14, p. 628.

60. <Iamblichus>, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 9.14-23; cf. *In Nicomachi arithmeticam introductionem* 76.17-79.25.

61. Numbers come from the participation of the Great and the Small in Unity; sensible things are constituted by the Forms and the Great and the Small; the Forms, understood as numbers, are composed of Unity and the Dyad of the Great and the Small.

(ὑποδοχή) and recompense (ἀνταπόδωσις) to their source in the Monad.[62] As the marriage (γάμος) of the Monad and Dyad, the Triad is associated with an intermediate realm, the Moon, and is called Hecate.[63] The lower World Soul, though subrational, is a solid spherical entity which orders the world and is called the Hexad, a projection of Hecate (ἑκατεβελήτις). Finally there is the realm of Matter, the physical cosmos, called the Tetrad. Aspects of this system also underlie the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

Nicomachus also employs the imagery of *Timaeus* 48E-52D when he characterizes the Monad as mind, bisexual, god, matter in a certain sense, all-receiver (παυδοχεῦς), container-like (χωρητική), chaos, mixture, composition, lightless, darkness, gap and Tartaros (*apud* Photius, *Biblioteca* 187, 143a.22-28). Like Moderatus, Nicomachus has the Dyad arise from the Monad, but unlike Moderatus' derivation of Quantity from the negative withdrawal or self-privation of the Monad, Nicomachus' model of derivation employs a process of self-doubling or expansion/extension of the Monad. Of course, both of these models are a departure from the old Academic notion of the primacy of two coeval opposite principles, and show the marks of Neopythagorean influence.[64]

D. Theon of Smyrna

Although he does not explicitly present a theological or metaphysical system, something of Theon's views can be deduced from his summary of the properties of the first ten numbers in his *Expositio* (99,24-106,11

62. <Iamblichus>, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 19.5-11; this seems to be another anticipation of the Neoplatonic doctrine of permanence, procession and reversion (μονή, πρόοδος and ἐπιστροφή), the three successive states of a lower hypostasis as it emanates from a higher one.

63. On the triad, cf. Nicomachus, *Theologoumena apud* <Iamblichus> *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 17,15-18,3: ὅτι ἀρχὴ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἀριθμοῦ ἡ τριὰς μονάδων συστήματι ὁριζομένου· μονὰς μὲν γὰρ τρόπον τινὰ ἡ δυὰς διὰ τὸ ἀρχοειδές, σύστημα δὲ μονάδος καὶ δυάδος ἡ τριὰς πρώτη· ἀλλὰ καὶ τέλους καὶ μέσου καὶ ἀρχῆς πρωτίστη ἐπιδεκτική, δι' ὧν τελειότης περαίνεται πᾶσα. εἶδος τῆς τῶν ὅλων τελεσιουργίας 18 καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀριθμὸς ἡ τριάς, ἰσότητα καὶ στέρησίν τινα τοῦ πλείονος καὶ ἐλάττονος τοῖς ὅλοις παρέσχεν, ὁρίσασα τὴν ὕλην καὶ μορφώσασα ποιοτήτων πασῶν δυνάμεσιν. According to Photius, *Bibliotheca* 187, 143b.21-2 (if this is Nicomachus) the triad causes the power of the monad to proceed into act and extension.

64. Cf. <Iamblichus>, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 3.17-6.18 [in part] reporting on the ideas of Nicomachus and Anatolius.

Hiller):[65] The Monad is the principle (ἀρχή) and most absolute of all things; from it are all things, though it itself is from nothing; it is indivisible and potentially all things, not yet having stood out of its nature by division. With it are ranked the intelligibles and the nature of the Ideas; it is God and Mind and absolute Goodness, Beauty, Justice and Equality.

Somewhat as in Nicomachus, for Theon the self-doubling of the Monad gives rise to the Dyad, which corresponds to Matter and everything that is perceptible and in generation, movement, growth, composition, commonness and relation. Combining with the Monad, the Dyad becomes the Triad, which is the first to have beginning, middle and end; thus the Triad is all things and plurality. The Tetrad is the first image and number of the solid and completes all harmonies. Finally, the perceptible world is represented by the Ogdoad as the cube, the shape of the earthly element. Although he does not mention him by name, Theon also quotes with approval Moderatus' views concerning the production of mathematical quantity and geometrical magnitude by means of procession from and reversion upon the Monad (*Expositio* 18,3-20,11).

65. Theon of Smyrna, *Expositio* 99,24-101,10 Hiller: ἡ μὲν γὰρ μονὰς ἀρχὴ πάντων καὶ κυριωτάτη πασῶν [...] [100 Hiller] καὶ ἐξ ἧς πάντα, αὐτὴ δὲ ἐξ οὐδενός, ἀδιαίρετος καὶ δυνάμει πάντα, ἀμετάβλητος, μηδεπώποτε τῆς αὐτῆς ἐξισταμένη φύσεως κατὰ τὸν πολλαπλασιασμόν· καθ' ἣν πᾶν τὸ νοητὸν καὶ ἀγέννητον καὶ ἡ τῶν ἰδεῶν φύσις καὶ ὁ θεὸς καὶ ὁ νοῦς καὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἑκάστη τῶν νοητῶν οὐσιῶν, οἷον αὐτὸ καλόν, αὐτὸ δίκαιον, αὐτὸ [τὸ] ἴσον· ἕκαστον γὰρ τούτων ὡς ἓν καὶ καθ' ἑαυτὸ νοεῖται. πρώτη δὲ αὔξη καὶ μεταβολὴ ἐκ μονάδος εἰς δυάδα κατὰ διπλασιασμὸν τῆς μονάδος, καθ' ἣν ὕλη καὶ πᾶν τὸ αἰσθητὸν καὶ ἡ γένεσις καὶ ἡ κίνησις καὶ ἡ αὔξησις καὶ ἡ σύνθεσις καὶ κοινωνία καὶ τὸ πρός τι. ἡ δὲ δυὰς συνελθοῦσα τῇ μονάδι γίνεται τριάς, ἥτις πρώτη ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσα καὶ τελευτὴν ἔχει. διὸ καὶ πρώτη λέγεται πάντα εἶναι· ἐπὶ γὰρ ἐλαττόνων αὐτῆς οὐ λέγεται πάντα εἶναι, ἀλλὰ ἓν καὶ ἀμφότερα, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν τριῶν πάντα. καὶ τρεῖς σπονδὰς ποιούμεθα δηλοῦντες ὅτι πάντα ἀγαθὰ αἰτούμεθα, καὶ τοὺς κατὰ πάντα ἀθλίους τρισαθλίους καλοῦμεν καὶ τοὺς κατὰ πάντα μακαρίους τρισμακαρίους. πρώτη δὲ καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἐπιπέδου φύσις ἐκ τούτου. ἡ γὰρ τριὰς οἷον εἰκὼν ἐπιπέδου, καὶ πρώτη αὐτοῦ ὑπόστασις ἐν τριγώνῳ, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τρία αὐτῶν γένη, ἰσόπλευρον ἰσοσκελὲς σκαληνόν [Γ]· [101 Hiller] τρεῖς δὲ καὶ γωνίαι ὁμοιούμεναι ἡ μὲν ὀρθὴ τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς φύσει, ὡρισμένη καὶ ἐξ ἴσου καὶ ὁμοίου συνεστῶσα· διὸ καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ὀρθαὶ ἀλλήλαις εἰσὶν ἴσαι, μέσαι οὖσαι ὀξείας καὶ ἀμβλείας καὶ ὑπερέχοντος καὶ ὑπερεχομένου· αἱ δὲ λοιπαὶ ἄπειροι καὶ ἀόριστοι· ἐκ γὰρ ὑπεροχῆς καὶ ἐλλείψεως συνεστᾶσιν. ἡ δὲ τριὰς ἐκ τῆς μονάδος καὶ δυάδος ς ποιεῖ κατὰ σύνθεσιν, ὅς ἐστι πρῶτος τέλειος ἀριθμὸς τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μέρεσιν ἴσος ὤν· ὁ δὲ τέλειος οὗτος συντεθεὶς τῷ πρώτῳ τετραγώνῳ τῇ τετράδι ποιεῖ τὴν δεκάδα.

This is all Neopythagorean, with little Old Academic influence. Note especially in Nicomachus and Theon how the Dyad arises from a self-doubling of the Monad, while in Moderatus, it arises by the Monad's self-privation of its unity.[66] The latter is similar to process which Numenius (frg. 52 des Places) attributes to "certain Pythagoreans" according to whom the Indefinite Dyad (*immensa duitatis*) arises when the monad recedes from its unique nature (*ab unica ... recendente a natura sua singularitate*).

E. The *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous (or Albinus of Smyrna)

In the *Didaskalikos* (long thought to have been written by Albinus, a Platonist pupil of Gaius and teacher of Galen, active in Smyrna ca. 100-165 CE) of a certain otherwise unknown Alcinous, we see little influence of Neopythagoreanism. Alcinous thinks more in terms of the Platonism formulated among the contemporaries of Cicero, and reflected in *Letters* 58 and 65 of Seneca.[67] His *Didaskalikos* (chs. VIII-X) holds the three principles of Platonism to be matter, ideas, and God. His hierarchy of being seems to consist of a first God, an active intellect, a potential intellect, and a cosmic soul, although (in spite of the phrase "still nobler than this") Dillon thinks that the first God and the active intellect are intended to be one and the same:[68]

66. See citations in nn. 21-26 above. Hippolytus shows that the Simonian *Megale Apophasis*, like the Valentinians, used the concept of emanation (προβολή, προέρχεσθαι) of a Dyad preexisting in the Monad (the Valentinians, *Ref.* VI.29.5-6; the *Megale Apophasis*, *Ref.* VI.18.4-7).

67. I here follow J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, 267-306 and his commentary on the *Didaskalikos*: *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); see too the commentary of J. WHITTAKER in *Alcinoos: Enseignement des doctrines de Platon*, introduction, texte établi et commenté par J. Whittaker et traduit par P. Louis (Association Gillaume Budé, CUF; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990).

68. *Didaskalikos* X.2-3 Hermann: Ἐπεὶ δὲ ψυχῆς νοῦς ἀμείνων, νοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἐν δυνάμει ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν πάντα νοῶν καὶ ἅμα καὶ ἀεί, τούτου δὲ καλλίων ὁ αἴτιος τούτου καὶ ὅπερ ἂν ἔτι ἀνωτέρω τούτων ὑφέστηκεν, οὗτος ἂν εἴη ὁ πρῶτος θεός, αἴτιος ὑπάρχων τοῦ ἀεὶ ἐνεργεῖν τῷ νῷ τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ. Ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἀκίνητος, αὐτὸς ὢν εἰς τοῦτον, ὡς καὶ ὁ ἥλιος εἰς τὴν ὅρασιν, ὅταν αὐτῷ προσβλέπῃ, καὶ ὡς τὸ ὀρεκτὸν κινεῖ τὴν ὄρεξιν ἀκίνητον ὑπάρχον· οὕτω γε δὴ καὶ οὗτος ὁ νοῦς κινήσει τὸν νοῦν τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ. 10.3 Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ πρῶτος νοῦς κάλλιστος, δεῖ καὶ κάλλιστον αὐτῷ νοητὸν ὑποκεῖσθαι, οὐδὲν δὲ αὐτοῦ κάλλιον· ἑαυτὸν ἂν οὖν καὶ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ νοήματα ἀεὶ νοοίη, καὶ αὕτη ἡ ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ ἰδέα ὑπάρχει. ... πατὴρ δέ ἐστι τῷ αἴτιος εἶναι πάντων καὶ

> 10.2 Since Intellect is better than Soul, and Intellect in activity intelligizing all things simultaneously and eternally is better than Intellect in potentiality, and still nobler than this is the cause of this and whatever might exist superior to these; this would be the Primal God, which is the cause of the eternal activity of the Intellect of the whole heaven. The former, motionless, activates this latter, even as the sun effects vision when someone looks at it, and as an object of desire sets desire in motion, while remaining itself motionless, even thus will this Intellect move the Intellect of the whole heaven. 3. But since the first Intellect is the noblest of things, there must be for it the noblest object of thought, and nothing is nobler than it is itself; so therefore it would have to contemplate eternally itself and its own thoughts, and this activity of it is Idea.... He (The Primal God) is Father by reason of the fact that he is cause of all things and sets in order the heavenly Intellect and the Soul of the World with respect to himself and his thoughts; for by his own will he has filled all things with himself, raising up the Soul of the World and turning it towards himself as the cause of its Intellect, which, having been set in order by the Father, itself sets in order the whole of Nature in this world. (*Didaskalikos* X.2-3 trans. Dillon)

Merely by serving as an object of desire, the absolutely motionless Primal God activates the first Intellect which by its own "motionless motion" causes the eternal activity of the second (potential) "Intellect of the entire heaven." The first Intellect contemplates itself and its thoughts (the Ideas) and is thus the paradigm of all things in nature,[69] and seems to be the rational aspect of the World Soul, whose subrational, potential Intellect is "awakened" and brought to order (*Didaskalikos* XIV.3) by the First Intellect, thence ordering nature by means of its own power and by various δαιμόνες who inhabit the heavens. Much of this sounds inspired by Aristotle's doctrine of the divine self-moved Intelligence, as Dillon and others have observed. While this seems to be the majority interpretation of this passage, one might alternatively understand it as envisioning a supreme principle transcending a double (active and potential or demiurgic) intellect that in turn presides over the cosmic soul, along lines similar to the three gods of Numenius.

κοσμεῖν τὸν οὐράνιον νοῦν καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κόσμου πρὸς ἑαυτὸν καὶ πρὸς τὰς ἑαυτοῦ νοήσεις. Κατὰ γὰρ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βούλησιν ἐμπέπληκε πάντα ἑαυτοῦ, τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ κόσμου ἐπεγείρας καὶ εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστρέψας, τοῦ νοῦ αὐτῆς αἴτιος ὑπάρχων· ὃς κοσμηθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς διακοσμεῖ σύμπασαν φύσιν ἐν τῷδε τῷ κόσμῳ.

69. Rather like Aristotle's (*Met.* XII 1072b3-13; 1074b33-1075a4) description of the first unmoved mover as a self-thinking cause of motion.

Alcinous' description of his First God is an excellent example of the sort of second-century negative theologies to be found both in non-gnostic sources such as Aristides' *Apologia* (I 4-5), and in the gnostic systems of *Eugnostos the Blessed* (III, 71-2), Basilides (ca. 125 CE *apud* Hippolytus, *Ref.* VII 20.2-21.1), and—to be discussed in Chapter 12—in the Sethian treatises *Apocryphon of John* and *Allogenes* (which share word-for-word common language: BG 23,3-26,13 = NHC II 3,18-25 = NHC XI 62,28-63,23), as well as in *Zostrianos* (VIII 64,13-66,11 also sharing common language with Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-40).[70] The *Didaskalikos* (X.3-4 = 164,31-165,14 Hermann) reads:[71]

> The first God is eternal, ineffable, self-complete, i.e., not wanting in anything, ever-perfect, i.e., eternally complete, all perfect, i.e., perfect in every respect; divinity, substantiality, truth, symmetry, and good. I say this not as distinguishing these terms from one another, but as all denoting a single thing. ... [positive attributes follow: good, beauty, truth, father] ... He is ineffable, comprehended by mind alone, as we have said, since he is neither genus or species nor differentia. Nor can anything be attributed to him, neither bad (for to say this is improper), nor good (which would mean his participation in something, especially goodness), nor indifferent (which is out of accord with [any] conception of him), nor qualified (for he has no quality nor even a perfected quality), nor unqualified (since he has not been deprived of some quality attached to him), nor is he a part, nor is he a whole possessing certain parts, nor is he the same or different from something (for nothing has been attributed to him by which he can be distinguished from the others), nor does he move nor is he moved. (trans. Dillon)

70. Cf. also Justin, II *Apologia* 6.1-2; Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 4.1; Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* I 3-4.

71. *Didaskalikos* X.3-4 [164,28-165,14 Hermann]: Καὶ μὴν ὁ πρῶτος θεὸς ἀίδιός ἐστιν, ἄρρητος, αὐτοτελὴς τουτέστιν ἀπροσδεής, ἀειτελὴς τουτέστιν ἀεὶ τέλειος, παντελὴς τουτέστι πάντη τέλειος· θειότης, οὐσιότης, ἀλήθεια, συμμετρία, ἀγαθόν. Λέγω δὲ οὐχ ὡς χωρίζων ταῦτα, ἀλλ' ὡς κατὰ πάντα ἑνὸς νοουμένου. Καὶ ἀγαθὸν μέν ἐστι, διότι πάντα εἰς δύναμιν εὐεργετεῖ, παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ αἴτιος ὤν· καλὸν δέ, ὅτι αὐτὸς τῇ ἑαυτοῦ φύσει τέλεόν ἐστι καὶ σύμμετρον· ἀλήθεια δέ, διότι πάσης ἀληθείας ἀρχὴ ὑπάρχει, ὡς ὁ ἥλιος παντὸς φωτός· Ἄρρητος δ' ἐστὶ καὶ νῷ μόνῳ ληπτός, ὡς εἴρηται, ἐπεὶ οὔτε γένος ἐστὶν οὔτε εἶδος οὔτε διαφορά, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ συμβέβηκέ τι αὐτῷ, οὔτε κακόν (οὐ γὰρ θέμις τοῦτο εἰπεῖν), οὔτε ἀγαθόν (κατὰ μετοχὴν γάρ τινος ἔσται οὗτος καὶ μάλιστα ἀγαθότητος), οὔτε ἀδιάφορον (οὐδὲ γὰρ τοῦτο κατὰ τὴν ἔννοιαν αὐτοῦ), οὔτε ποιόν (οὐ γὰρ ποιωθέν ἐστι καὶ ὑπὸ ποιότητος τοιοῦτον ἀποτετελεσμένον), οὔτε ἄποιον (οὐ γὰρ ἐστέρηται τοῦ ποιὸν εἶναι ἐπιβάλλοντός τινος αὐτῷ ποιοῦ)· οὔτε μέρος τινός, οὔτε ὡς ὅλον ἔχον τινὰ μέρη, οὔτε ὥστε ταὐτόν τινι εἶναι ἢ ἕτερον· οὐδὲν γὰρ αὐτῷ συμβέβηκε, καθ' ὃ δύναται τῶν ἄλλων χωρισθῆναι· οὔτε κινεῖ οὔτε κινεῖται.

As E. R. Dodds showed in 1928,[72] this negative theology is only a natural development of Plato's doctrine of the Good "beyond being in power and dignity" in *Republic* VI 509B and of the speculations about the non-being of the One in the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. The *Parmenides* not only lent itself to the problem of deriving the realm of Being and Intelligence from the absolute unity of the One, but also to the problem of characterizing this absolute One as the supreme principle of a hierarchical metaphysics. Hypothesis I of the *Parmenides* (137C-142A) presents an absolutely pure, unique and unqualified "One," which cannot properly be said to "be" at all. Since any attribute such as "being" entails predication, implying a measure of plurality in its subject whose unity is thereby compromised, all one can do is resort to negative predicates or deny it any predicates whatsoever. The non-existence of this One follows because it is neither a whole nor made up of parts (137C-D); it has neither beginning, nor middle, nor end (137D); it is shapeless, neither round nor straight (137D-138A); it is not anywhere, neither in another nor in itself (138A-B); it is neither at rest nor in motion (138B-139B); it is neither other than nor the same as itself or another (139B-E); it is neither similar nor dissimilar to itself or another (139E-140B); it is without measure or sameness and so is neither equal to nor larger than nor smaller than itself or another (140B-C); it is has nothing to do with time or any length of time since it is neither the same age as nor older nor younger than itself or another (140E-141D); it neither was nor will be nor is (141D-E).

> Therefore the one in no sense *is*. It cannot, then, 'be' even to the extent of being one, for then it would be a thing that is and has being. Rather, if we can trust such an argument as this, it appears that the one neither is one nor is at all. And if a thing is not, you cannot say that it '*has*' anything or that there is anything '*of*' it. Consequently, it cannot *have* a name or be spoken of, nor can there be any knowledge or perception or opinion *of* it. It is not named or spoken of, not an object of opinion or of knowledge, not perceived by anything that *is*. (*Parmenides* 141E-142A trans. Cornford)

The *Didaskalikos* (X.3-4) of Alcinous certainly draws on this passage, with certain modifications. It interprets the absence of shape (ἀνευσχή-

72. E. R. DODDS, "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928), 129-142, esp. 132-133.

ματος) of the *Parmenides* as absence of quality (οὔτε ποιόν) and adds the positive categories of aseity or self-completion (αὐτοτελής, interpreted negatively as ἀπροσδεής, needing nothing), all-perfection (παντελής), divinity (θειότης), and substantiality (οὐσιότης); as we shall see these are also terms that occur in the Neoplatonizing Sethian treatises. To be compared is the following passage from Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* V.12.81.4.1-82.4.1:

> This discourse respecting God is most difficult to handle. For since the first principle of everything is difficult to discover, the absolutely first and oldest principle, which is the cause of all other things that are and have been, is difficult to exhibit. For how can that be expressed which is neither genus, nor difference, nor species, nor individual, nor number; moreover, is neither an event, nor that to which an event happens? No one can rightly express Him wholly. For on account of His greatness He is ranked as the All, and is the Father of the All. Nor are any parts to be predicated of Him. For the One is indivisible; wherefore also it is infinite, not considered with reference to endlessness, but with reference to its being without dimensions, and not having a limit. And therefore it is formless and nameless. And if we name it, we do not do so properly, terming it either the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Absolute Being, or Father, or God, or Creator or Lord. We speak not as supplying His name; but for want, we use positive names, in order that the mind may have these as points of support, so as not to err in other respects. For each one by itself does not express God; but all together are indicative of the power of the Omnipotent. For predicates are expressed either from what belongs to things themselves, or from their mutual relation. But none of these are admissible in reference to God. Nor any more is He apprehended by the science of demonstration. For it depends on primary and better known principles. But there is nothing antecedent to the Unbegotten.

As Whittaker has pointed out,[73] both these passages (together with the Sethian treatises) are mutually dependent upon a "theologically inclined

73. J. WHITTAKER, "Philological Comments on the Neoplatonic Notion of Infinity," *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. B. Harris (Studies in Neoplatonism 1; Norfolk, VA: International Society of Neoplatonic Studies, 1976), 155-172, esp. 156-159. On such negative theologies, see H. A. WOLFSON, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides," *Harvard Theological Review* 50 (1957), 145-156, cf. also J. WHITTAKER, "Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology," *Symbolae Osloensis* 44 (1960), 109-125; *IDEM*, "Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute," 77-86; *Symbolae Osloensis* 48 (1973); *IDEM*, "ΕΠΕΚΕΙΝΑ ΝΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΟΥΣΙΑΣ," *Vigiliae Christianae* 23 (1969), 91-104; *IDEM*, *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984); *IDEM*, *Alcinoos. Enseignement des doctrines de Platon.* Introduction, texte établi et

Middle Platonic commentary upon," or "a Middle Platonic theologico-metaphysical adaptation of" the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. In Whittaker's words, these passages provide "incontestable proof of a pre-Plotinian theological interpretation of the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, and they must be taken seriously into account when one weighs the value of Simplicius' [*In Phys.* 9.230,34-231,27 Diels] report (drawn from Porphyry) of a metaphysical interpretation on Neoplatonic lines of the first three Hypostases by the Platonist Moderatus in the first century after Christ" (as indicated earlier in this chapter in the section on Moderatus).

F. Numenius of Apamea (and Amelius of Tuscany)

Numenius (fl. 150-175 CE), was widely regarded as a Pythagorean. He displays a very complicated system of three Gods, which has been interpreted in a number of ways, owing to apparent contradictions between fragments of his work "On the Good" contained in Eusebius' *Preparation of the Gospel* and various *testimonia* from such later authors as Proclus, Calcidius, Porphyry, Macrobius, and Iamblichus. His triad of Gods may have been inspired by the first three hypotheses of the *Parmenides* as well as by the three kings of Plato's *Second Letter* (312E), and the distinction between his second and third gods was surely based on the dual role (contemplative [καθορῶν] and planning [διανοούμενος]) of the demiurge in the Timaeus (39E, διενοήθη), which Plotinus also discussed (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 1; III, 9 [13] 6). Following the admirable reconstruction of M. Baltes, Numenius seems to exhibit the following structure:[74]

commenté par J. Whittaker et traduit par P. Louis (Collection des universités de France. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990); J. MANSFELD, "Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. R. Van den Broek *et. al.* (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 112. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988, 92-117); M. JUFRESA, "Basilides, A Path to Plotinus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981), 1-15; R. MORTLEY, *From Word to Silence. I: The Rise and Fall of Logos; II: The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* (Theophaneia 30-31; Bonn: Hanstein, 1986); and R. VAN DEN BROEK, "Eugnostos and Aristides on the Ineffable God," *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (ed. R. Van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld; Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 112; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 202-218.

74. M. BALTES, "Numenios von Apamea und der platonische Timaios," *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975), 241-270.

The first God is an inert Mind, called the Monad, King and Sower; it is the Good in itself, characterized by stability and motionless motion, and is equated with the supreme principle of *Timaeus* 39E (ὅ ἐστι ζῷον, "that which is really alive," frg. 22 des Places). Though not explicit in Numenius' system, this Monad seems to be opposed by an Indefinite Dyad, i.e. Matter, at first precosmic and unbegotten, but subsequently begotten by the demiurge (i.e. by the second and third Gods; cf. frg. 52 des Places). The second God is the plurality of the Forms; called Good and Cultivator, he is a Mind in motion, contemplating (καθορῶν, θεωρητικός) the first God, in which act he is self-generated (αὐτοποιεῖ τὴν ἰδέαν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὸν κόσμον) as an imitation of the first God (frg. 16 des Places). But this self-generation is also the generation of the world; that is, the second God is dyadic, alternating between contemplation and demiurgic activity (for so I interpret δημιουργὸς ὤν, ἔπειτα θεωρητικὸς ὅλως frg. 16, against most interpreters),[75] and thinks by use (πρόσχρησις) of a lower aspect of himself, the third God. The third God is the demiurge insofar as he is occupied with Matter, in fact a sort of conjunction between the second God and matter, and is the Mind which intends or plans (διανοούμενος) the world. In this regard the third God fashions the world soul out of a combination of himself as a monadic, rational organizing principle and Matter, a passive, unbounded dyadic principle which seems to have existed originally as a primal principle along with the first God. Thus Numenius' third God corresponds to something like the Logos or the rational part of the World Soul in the thinkers we have previously described. According to frg. 12, these alternating contemplative and demiurgic phases have a direct impact on human life:

> Our journey begins when the divine intellect is sent on a traversal (ἐν διεξόδῳ) to all those appointed to share in it; whenever the (second) God looks and turns toward each of us, the consequence is that life (ζῆν) results and bodies live (βιώσκεσθαι), tended by God's far-shooting rays. Yet whenever he turns again towards his watchtower, all this is extinguished, while the (divine) Mind continues to live a blissful life (ζῆν βίου εὐδαίμονος).

75. In frg. 16 des Places, the second God as demiurge spontaneously produces both his own form and the world, and then (ἔπειτα) becomes completely contemplative.

Fourth comes the irrational component of the World Soul as a conjunction of the demiurge (third God) with Matter. Since the world Soul is a rationally ordered combination of form and matter, it can be said to potentially contain both a good and an evil soul, a notion found earlier in Plutarch (*De animae proc.* 1026E-1027A; *de Is. et Osir.* 372E). For this reason, the third God is the rational part of the World Soul (*anima beneficientissima*, frg. 52 des Places), while the passive, hylic component of the World Soul that remains unmastered by the rational component actually constitutes a lower, evil soul. The final level is the sensible world.

Numenius' doctrine of three gods quite likely influenced Plotinus' disciple Amelius, who according to Proclus[76] claimed that there were three demiurges or intellects in a mutual union, or perhaps a triple demiurge consisting of three intellects, a first one (variously described as "he who is," the first "King" [cf. Plato's *Second Letter* 312E], "Phanes," or the "one who plans" or "intends," to be identified with the ὅ ἐστι ζῷον

76. Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* I.306,1-14 (cf. III.103,18-104,8): "Amelius conceives the Demiurge as triple, and says that there are three Intellects, three Kings, he who *is*, he who *possesses*, and he who *sees* (ὄντα, ἔχοντα, ὁρῶντα). The first intellect *is* really what he is; the second is the Intelligible which is in him, but he *possesses* the Intelligible which is prior to him, and in all ways participates solely in him, and is for this reason second; and third too is what is in him—for all Intellect is identical with the Intelligible linked to it—but he also *possesses* the contents of the second Intellect, and *sees* the first element; for the intensity of possession becomes dimmer according to the degree of remoteness. These three Intellects and Demiurges he also identifies with the three Kings of Plato (*Letter* 2.312E), Phanes, Ouranos, Kronos." *Ibid.*, I.398,16-26: "Amelius remarkably extends Plato by recognizing the various demiurgic causes continually jumping from one to another in a noiseless course, demonstrating nothing about the continuity of the divine causes themselves, but as if arranged around one and the same being through a mutual union of demiurges. For all are one and one are all, since now one plans (βουληθεῖς), another reasons (λογιζόμενος), another operates on (παραλαβών) the world, and one makes solely by intention (βούλησις), one by intellection and the fact of thinking (νόησις καὶ νοεῖν), and one by the work of his hand (μεταχείρησις), for he places intellect in soul and soul in body and thus the all is fashioned." And *ibid.*, I.361,26-362,4: "So if Amelius spoke in this way of the three demiurges, seeing this triad as a unity, he spoke correctly. For the one he says is maker by the work of his hand, one makes solely by command (ἐπίταξις), and one solely by intention. One is to be arranged in the category of work for himself, one pre-exists as the architect, and one is seated before both as king. Insofar as the demiurge is intellect, he brings all things forward by his thoughts (παράγει ... νοήσεσι); insofar as he is an intelligible object, he makes by his very existence (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι); insofar as he is god, he makes by his own will alone."

of *Timaeus* 39E), a second one (variously described as "the one who possessed" [the intelligible prior to him], the second "King," "Ouranos," "the one who reasons" (λογιζόμενος) by intellection, or the one who makes solely "by command"), and a third (as "the one who sees," the third "King," "Kronos," or the "one who operates on" (παραλαβῶν) the world "by the work of his hand"). Frg. 46 des Places implies that the combination of the highest form (the first God as the "idea" of the second) with matter produces the plurality of Forms associated with the second God; unlike Porphyry, for whom sensibles alone participated in Forms, for Numenius, Cronius, and Amelius, both the intelligibles and sensibles as a whole participate in the Ideas, implying that if intelligibles participate in something Form-like, they must contain a material or dyadic element something like Plotinus' "intelligible matter."

As seems to have been the case with Speusippus, it seems that Numenius had associated some form of Matter or an (indefinite) dyadic principle with his four main ontological levels. Insofar as the second God is associated with Matter, it is split by it, becoming a second and third God (frg. 11 des Places). The combination of the second God with Matter is the third God, i.e. the beneficent (aspect of the World) Soul. The combination of Matter with the third God is the lower or subrational aspect of the World Soul. Although the evidence is fragmentary, it seems that Numenius has suppressed explicit mention of a feminine dyadic principle near the ontological summit, perhaps in the interests of a philosophical monism typical of Neopythagoreanism, and because he views it as the source of evil. But he obviously presupposes its prior, precosmic presence in the role of the Matter which splits the second God. At the level of the second God, the material principle, regarded as the source of evil, would be *sui generis*, underivable from the first principle of his system, since Numenius rejected the derivation of the dyad from the monad as found in other Neopythagorean sources.[77] As opposed to the previous Neopythagoreanizing Middle Platonists surveyed here, for whom the dyad is somehow derived from the One or monad, Numenius is a strict dualist: the monad (his first God) and the dyad (matter) are completely unrelated and eternally opposed principles. In view of the close relationship between the theology of Numenius and of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which abound in triads and feature a central feminine figure, one may wonder whether part of this relationship may be a critical and revisionist one on the part of Numenius; his tendency to demote feminine principles and associate them with the rise of evil seems to show itself in Plutarch and in gnostic myths of Sophia. On the other hand, Numenius' portrayal of monad and dyad as coeval opposed principles approximates much more than the others the doctrine of the Old Academy, as he himself states (frg. 52 des Places).

77. E.g. in the system reflected in Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* 10.248-284, and in the Neopythagorean systems as reported by Alexander Polyhistor (*apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* VIII.125-35), and espoused by Nicomachus and Theon, all of which could be influenced by the Pythagorean Thrasyllos, court philosopher of the Emperor Tiberius. A champion of the Old Academic two-opposed principles doctrine, Numenius has only scorn for those Pythagoreans who, like Moderatus, attempt to derive an indefinite Dyad from the Monad by some process of receding from its singular nature and taking on duality (frg. 52 des Places, cited in n. 42).

G. The Chaldaean Oracles

Roughly contemporary with or somewhat later than Numenius are the *Chaldaean Oracles*, usually attributed to Julian the Theurgist who was credited with a miraculous deliverance of Marcus Aurelius' troops in 173 CE (or perhaps to his father, Julian "the Chaldaean").[78] The *Oracles*,

78. According to L. BRISSON (abstract of "Plato's *Timaeus* and the Chaldean Oracles," a paper presented at *Plato's Timaeus as Cultural Icon*: International Conference on the Legacy of Plato's *Timaeus*, March 30-April 1, 2000, University of Notre Dame), "In the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD), Plato expressed himself through the mouth of a medium (Julian the son), and set forth the essential features of his doctrine, as presented in the Timaeus, in the context of oracular consultations requested by Julian senior. The surviving fragments of the Chaldaean Oracles bear witness to this strange interpretation of the Timaeus, developed within a magical context. Here we shall consider its contents. The interpretative context in which the Chaldaean Oracles were written is that of Middle Platonism, which developed around the three principles of God, the Models, and Matter. God appears in threefold form: he is the Father, Hecate, and the Demiurge. Hecate, the female divinity, could be considered as the spouse of the Father and the mother of the Demiurge. The Forms, which correspond to the Models, the thoughts of the Father, are called *Iynges* and considered to be fire. The Demiurge uses this fire to carry out within the *Kratêr*, assimilated to Hecate, the mixture from which all souls derive: the World Soul, to be sure, but all the other souls as well, and in particular the human soul, which are all pieces of fire. The Demiurge also uses this fire to fabricate sensible bodies, by directing the intelligible fire downwards. This fire is first distributed among the four elements, from which the world in its totality and the whole of our body derive their form. The point of departure for each derivation is called a 'spring': we then encounter fountains, channels, and finally brooks. This is why

which share several points of contact with Numenius, also exhibit a hierarchical system with many Neopythagorean features.

The supreme God is called the Father, Bythos (frg. 18 des Places), who is totally transcendent and silent (frg. 16), having nothing to do with creation, and can only be apprehended by "the flower of the mind," a non-knowing, cognitively vacant intellectual contemplation (frg. 1, a notion found also in *Allogenes* and in the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary to be discussed below). The Father is the Monad, presumably beyond being (ἄπαξ ἐπέκεινα, Psellus, *Hypotypôsis*. 7, p. 74,7 Kroll). Associated "with" him is a feminine entity, his "power," which neither goes forth from the Father nor "consorts" with him, but which he merely encloses in Matter.[79] This feminine "power" is one member of his triadic nature, which is comprised of the Father himself—which Damascius (*Dub. et sol.* 61, I.131.17 Ruelle; cf. frg. 1, line 10 des Places) also calls "existence" (ὕπαρξις)—his power, and his intellect, the third of which is said to proceed "from" him as a secondary intellect, since the Father remains aloof from his power and intellect, from which he extracts himself (i.e., "his fire" as his hypostatic reality; frgs. 3, 4, and 5), leaving these to become the actual second mind, the paternal intellect.[80]

sensible bodies may be described as 'particular channels.' Matter comes forth from the Father; it furnishes a 'bed' for bodies, which are 'channels.' The individual soul must flee, via a movement of conversion, from this place of perdition into which it has descended, to return up to the Father, where it will find the fire which constitutes its nature. In order to ensure salvation, several divinities must participate in the framework of specific rites and prayers." See also L. BRISSON, "La place des *Oracles Chaldaïques dans la Théologie Platonicienne*," in *Proclus at la Théologie Platonicienne: Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13-16 Mai 1998) en l'honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel (Lueven: University Press/Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000), 109-162.

79. Frg. 3 des Places: ὁ πατὴρ ἥρπασσεν ἑαυτόν, οὐδ' ἐν ἑῇ δυνάμει νοερᾷ κλείσας ἴδιον πῦρ. frg. 4: ἡ μὲν γὰρ δύναμις σὺν ἐκείνῳ, νοῦς δ' ἀπ' ἐκείνου. Frg. 5: οὐ γὰρ ἐς ὕλην πῦρ ἐπέκεινα τὸ πρῶτον ἐὴν δύναμιν κατακλείει ἔργοις ἀλλὰ νόῳ· νοῦ γὰρ νόος ἐστὶν ὁ κόσμου τεχνίτης πυρίου. Frg. 6 on Hecate: ὡς γὰρ ὑπεζωκώς τις ὑμὴν νοερὸς διακρίνει, πῦρ πρῶτον καὶ πῦρ ἕτερον σπεύδοντα μιγῆναι.

80. H. LEWY relates frg. 3 (ἡ μὲν γὰρ δύναμις σὺν ἐκείνῳ̣ [scil. τῷ πατρί] νοῦς δὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνου, Proclus, *In Alc.* 84-14; *In Tim.* I.389,27) to *Anon. Taur. in Parm.* IX, 1-2 Hadot 2.90 (*Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* [Recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire XIII; Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1956], p. 79, n. 47). While Lewy thinks this νοῦς is an emanation of the Chaldaean πατρικὸς νοῦς, it is also possible that it is the πατρικὸς νοῦς itself. This verse may have formed the

As in the case of Moderatus' "Second One," the "unitary logos" or "monad," whose self-deprivation of all unitive elements gives rise to quantity, the *Oracles* too begin with an already articulated entity from which unity retreats so that ontogenesis can proceed and (the "paternal") intellect *per se* can come into being (as "self-generated," frg. 39); in Moderatus this occurs on the second level, such that the unitive elements of the Monad probably retreat into the First One, while in the *Oracles*, the Father is already on the highest level, leaving the destination of his self-retreat rather unclear.

The "paternal" Intellect thus becomes a separately existing demiurgic intellect (frg. 5), which both contemplates the intelligibles within itself and also sows them throughout the cosmos (frg. 37) as the ideas (variously called symbols, frg. 108, fire and light, frg. 39, or Iynges, frgs. 77-78) that inform matter (by striking it like lightening, frgs. 35 and 37), imparting to them a ceaseless vitality and motion (frg. 49), as well as bringing sense-perception to the world; frgs. 7 and 8); much like the second God of Numenius, it is oriented towards both what is below it and what is above (actually, within) it. Like the Father with his own power and intellect, this second, demiurgic Intellect is also a triadic monad, called the triad that "measures" the intelligibles (i.e. the Ideas) that flow from the Father. From both this second triad ("which is not the first") and from the first triad (the Father) flows the "bond" of the second (frgs. 26-29 and 31),[81] indicating that the plurality of Forms contained a dyadic element, a notion ultimately inherited from Plato's doctrine of the Unlimited or "the Great and the Small" interacting first with Limit or the One to produce the Forms and thence with the Forms to produce sensibles.[82]

The "bond" (δέμα) of this "measuring triad" also seems to be identified with Hecate, whom frg. 50 calls a diaphragm or membrane (ὑπεζωκώς τις ὑμὴν νοερός), the "center between the two Fathers,"

basis of the triad Being or Existence, Life or Power, and Mind in the commentary as well as in the Sethian doctrine of the Triple Powered One.

81. Frg. 31 des Places: literally ἄμφοιν, "from both," meaning from the monadic Father and the dyadic intellect, or perhaps from two of the three faculties of the monadic Father, i.e., his power and intellect. It seems that this "measuring triad," which accounts for the multiplicity of the "measured" ideas, constitutes a third being midway between the Father and the demiurgic Intellect.

82. Cf. *Philebus* 16C, 23C, 24A-26D and the doctrines attributed to him by Aristotle (*Metaphysics* I, 6).

which separates the "first and second fires" (frg. 6), i.e. the Father and the paternal Intellect.[83] Thus Hekate not only separates the first ("Father") and second intellects, but also, as the "bond" and as Rhea, the Father's generative womb, she associates them together, almost as if she were the Father's consort and mother of the second intellect.[84] Psellus (*Expositio Orac. Chald.* 7 1152a = p. 74,9 Kroll, 189 des Places) says that she is in the middle of the "source-fathers" (πηγαῖοι πατέρες), flanked by the ἄπαξ ἐπέκεινα (which Dillon translates "Transcendental I") above her, and the δὶς ἐπέκεινα ("Transcendental II") below her,[85] which, as Dillon points out, would make Hecate the median element in the second "measuring" triad, thus the representative of the supreme Father's "power" on the immediately subjacent level.[86] I would amplify this observation by claiming that in fact Hecate here exists in two modes or aspects: on a lower level she is the maternal element ("bond" or "womb") of the measuring, demiurgical triad below the supreme Father, but on a higher level she prefiguratively exists as the very "power" of the supreme Father.

On the higher level of the measuring triad, Hecate is generated by the Father as the womb that receives his lightening (the ideas), "the girdling bloom of fire and the powerful breath beyond the fiery poles" (frg. 35 des Places). At a subsequent level, the Father's intelligible fire that is received into the womb of Hecate (frg. 56) is then shaped by the second, demiurgic intellect into the Cosmic Soul and individual souls, and thence as sensible bodies is directed (as "channels" frgs. 65, 66) into the

83. As the "center between the two Fathers," she is perhaps the triadic expression of the supreme Father's power. The terms "measuring" and "measured" (frgs. 1 and 23; in frg. 31 the νοητά are measured by the bond of a first triad "which is not the first") recall the principle of the Unlimited or of the More and Less of Plato's *Philebus*, which submits to Unity or Measure so as to produce the Forms.

84. According to L. BRISSON, "In traditional mythology, Rhea is the spouse of Kronos and the mother of Zeus; thus her assimilation to Hecate seems to imply that this goddess if the spouse-daughter or the first Father, and the mother-sister of the Demiurge, in accordance with a scheme we find elsewhere, particularly in Orphism" ("Plato's *Timaeus* and the Chaldean Oracles," manuscript, p. 10).

85. These titles seem to result from an interpretation of the Chaldaean deities Ad and Adad (= "Haddad"). "Adad" is "Ad" doubled; cf. Proclus, *In Parm.* VII.512,1-7.

86. J. DILLON, "Female Principles in Platonism," in *IDEM*, *The Golden Chain* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1990), 122; cf. *IDEM*, *The Middle Platonists*, 394-395.

receptacle-like "hollows" of the cosmos (frgs. 34; 61d, 90).[87] Here Hecate is pictured as the life-producing fount (frgs. 30 and 32; cf. frgs. 96, 136 [ζώσῃ δυνάμει]) from whose right side flows the World Soul (whose ontological level is apparently immediately below that of the demiurgic paternal Intellect; frg. 51), while her left side retains the source of virtue.[88] Upon her back, the emblem of the moon (her traditional symbol) represents boundless Nature, and her serpentine hair represents the Father's winding noetic fire in the form of the celestial bodies (frgs. 50-55). In her alternate designation as Rhea, she is the source of the intellectuals (νόερα) whose generation she has received in her ineffable womb and upon whom she pours forth the vivifying fire (frgs. 32 and 56); as ζωογόνος θεά, she is the source of life, a veritable mother of the all. Thus Hecate functions on at least two levels: on a higher level she is the Father's emanative power, playing a role similar to that of the Neopythagorean Dyad or Plotinus' intelligible matter or trace of unbounded Life emitted from the One to become bounded Intellect (*Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 17). On a lower level as Rhea, she is conceived—much like Plato's receptacle—as the Womb within which all things are sown and contained (frgs. 28, 30), where this matter is then variegated by the demiurge and introduced into the world; in this sense, she is assimilated to the crater or bowl in which the demiurge mixes the ingredients of the soul (*Timaeus* 34B3-8); thus Hecate is not the World Soul, but its source.[89]

87. Cf. the "cosmic hollows" of frgs. 34 (and 35), and the πολλῶν πληρώματα κόλπων of frg. 96.

88. Hecate's triform nature (three heads, six arms) is well-known from antiquity. She is guardian of forks in the road (as τριοδῖτις) and identified with the three phases of the moon; cf. W. H. ROSCHER, "Hekate," in *IDEM*, ed., *Ausfürliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, 7 vols. (Hildesheim: G. Olms, [reprint] 1965), 4.1886-1910. According to Hesiod (*Theogony* 412-428), Hecate is awarded three cosmic spheres of influence (earth, sky, sea), first by the Titans in the older order and then by Zeus in the new, and she also exercises influence over the world of men in the Indo-European trifunctional spheres of sovereignty, force and productivity outlined by G. Dumezil; cf. D. BOEDECKER, "Hecate: A Transfunctional Goddess?," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 113 (1983), 79-93.

89. Some commentators, including R. MAJERCIK (*The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* [Studies in Greek and Roman Religion 5; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989], *ad loc.*) and S. I. JOHNSON (*Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldaean Oracles and Related Literature* [American Classical Studies

Finally, the lowest ontological level of the *Oracles* is occupied by the realm of Matter springing from both the Intellect and Father (frgs. 34-35), a formless, twisted abyss without intellect or breath that receives sensible images of the forms (frg. 163). In the *Oracles*, the matter that springs from the "Source of Sources" (frg. 34) is of different sorts, sometimes positive (perhaps as shaped by the demiurge, frgs. 216, 173) and sometimes evil, even "bitter" (perhaps as yet unmastered by the demiurge, frg. 129).

Perhaps under the influence of Numenius, the *Oracles* posited as the highest god a first intellect that contains all the Ideas and is entirely self-directed and self-sufficient, and a second god or intellect that looks both to the first intellect and to the world, in order to instantiate the Ideas in the world and maintain it in existence. Between and separating these two intellects stands Hecate, functioning as a mediating principle. While Dillon points out that Hecate exists on both a higher and lower level, both as the "center" between the two Fathers—perhaps identical with the supreme Father's power—and as the immanent aspect of the World Soul itself on a lower level, one might suggest that in fact she may exist even on three levels: first, prefiguratively as the supreme Father's power; second, as the "center" between the Fathers and "bond" of the measuring triad who serves as the cosmic womb and source of the cosmic soul; and perhaps even on a third level, as the material substrate of the cosmos, as its "hollows" or receptacle (frgs. 34; 61d, 90, 96). Dillon suggests that here, as in Speusippus (and probably also in Moderatus, Nicomachus, Plutarch and Numenius), there is a female principle of indefiniteness and multiplicity that manifests itself at every ontological level from the primordial Dyad through the cosmic soul down to matter.[90]

Based on these features and the testimony of John Lydus (*De mensibus* 4.122.1-4) derived from Porphyry, P. Hadot[91] postulates a supreme Chaldaean ennead: the first triad of the Father containing his

21; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 45-67) restrict the place of Hecate exclusively to that of the cosmic soul.

90. *Middle Platonists*, 394. See my "The Figure of Hecate and Dynamic Emanationism in The Chaldaean Oracles, Sethian Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *The Second Century Journal* 7:4, (1991), 221-232, and S. I. Johnson, *Hekate Soteira*, ch. 5.

91. See P. HADOT, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (2 vols.; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968), 1.260-272.

existence, power and intellect; the second triad of the dyadically oriented (above and below) demiurgic Intellect, the expression of the Father's power, which seems to be the triform Hecate who causes the multiplicity of the Ideas; and thirdly the measured triad representing the multiplicity of the Ideas, where the lower Hecate functions as the immanent world soul and source of boundless Nature. Hadot also thinks that Porphyry himself must have been inspired by the *Oracles* to locate Hecate at this upper level in his own metaphysics (*apud* Augustine, *De civ. dei* X.23: *patris et filii medium*), and he provides a diagram (slightly amplified here by me) to show the structure presupposed in the Chaldaean "system," in which the vertical axis represents the metaphysical hierarchy, and the horizontal axis represents the relative predominance (italicized) of the components of the triad at each level:

Paternal Monad:	*Father*	his power	his intellect
Hecate	Father	*power* (life)	intellect
Dyadic Intellect	Father	power	*intellect*
Measured triad (Ideas)	Iynges	Synocheis	Teletarchai
Hecate, the membrane	fount of life		
The Soul (Hecate?)	mistress of life from the Father's power		
Physis			

Although Plotinus seems to have largely ignored them, the *Chaldaean Oracles*' description of the supreme Father as a trinity in unity and the portrayal of all reality as triadically organized led the Neoplatonists after him to construe the supreme triad as constituted by the Father's existence (ὕπαρξις), power (δύναμις) and intelligence (νοῦς), which they saw as corresponding to Plotinus' intelligible triad of Being, Life, and Intellect and to the main moments of permanence (μονή), procession (πρόοδος), and reversion (ἐπιστροφή) in the generation of reality from a supreme principle.

In sum, it seems that Hecate exists on two or three levels: prefiguratively and potentially as the supreme Father's "power," as the indefinite and perhaps dyadic "bond," "center," or "membrane" of the measuring triad who is the source and "womb" of both matter and the cosmic soul and multiplicity, and perhaps finally as the all-receiving cosmic hollows. If so, we shall see that these three phases of Hecate's existence as the prefiguration, source and place of the instantiation of ideal multiplicity strikingly resembles the Sethian figure of Barbelo both in her own person and also in her relationship to her lower double, Sophia. Although

the *Oracles* do not invoke Plato's Father, Mother, and Child triad by name, it seems to be functionally present at the highest level in the figures of the Father, his "power" who is the prefigurative Hecate, and the paternal Intellect emanated from the Father's power and intellect (although Hecate is not said to be the "mother" of this Intellect).

H. The Anonymous (Porphyrian?) *Parmenides Commentary*

A hierarchy of predominating phases in the unfolding of Intelligence from the One similar to that of the *Chaldaean Oracles* is found an the anonymous Turin palimpsest commentary on the *Parmenides*, which P. Hadot has attributed to Porphyry, and which contains a doctrine very similar to that of the Christian theologian Marius Victorinus.[92]

The first four fragments deal with the One of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* and the last two with the One-Being of the second hypothesis. Fragment 1 deals with the concept of the One in terms of negative theology: the One's simplicity is not a deficiency, since the superabundant power of the One has produced the world; yet as cause, it cannot be identified with its derivatives. To conceive the One, one must undertake a "non-comprehending comprehension and an intellection that intuits nothing," arriving at "an ineffable preconception representing the One in silence, without awareness of that silence, or consciousness that it is the One's image, or indeed any kind of knowledge." In a sense, the One has no relation to anything else; although negative theology implies of the non-being of the One, actually the One is the only real Existent, while it is all else that is nothing in relation to it. In fragment 4, the One is said to be superior even to the positive statements about God in the *Chaldaean Oracles*. As for the One-Being in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (142B-145A), which Porphyry identified with the Plotinian Intellect, it is both identical and not identical with the absolute One of the first hypothesis (137C-142A), which is absolute infinitival

92. First published by W. KROLL, "Ein neuplatonischer Parmenides-kommentar in einem Turiner Palimpsest," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 47 (1892), 599-627. Here cited in the edition of P. HADOT, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (2 vols.; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968), 2.61-113. See especially P. HADOT, "Fragments d'un commentaire de Porphyre sur le Parménide," *Revue des Études Grecques* 74 (1961), 410-438; *IDEM*, "La métaphysique de Porphyre," in *Porphyre* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 12; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1966), 125-157; and *IDEM*, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 1 (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968), *passim*.

being (τὸ εἶναι) beyond the derived participial being (τὸ ὄν) of the second One:[93]

> But perhaps one must say that, since the second is [derived] from the first, therefore the second is called One by participation in the first (One of Plato's *Parmenides* 137C-142A), the whole of the One-Being (ἕν εἶναι; i.e., the "second" One of *Parmenides* 142B-145A) having been engendered by participation in the (first) One. And it (this One-Being which is in the second One) has not been engendered in a first phase and participated subsequently in the One, but has been engendered apart from the (first) One having declined from it. It has not been said (by Plato) that Being participates in the One, but that the One participates in Being (τὸ ὄν), not because the first was Being (τὸ ὄν), but because an otherness (ἑτερότης) from the One has turned the One towards this whole One-Being (τὸ ἓν εἶναι). For from the fact of being engendered somehow at the second level, being-One (τὸ ἓν εἶναι) is added.... the One, which is beyond substance and being (ὄντως ὄν), is neither substance (οὐσία) nor act (ἐνέργεια), but rather acts (ἐνεργεῖ) and is itself pure act (ἐνεργεῖν), such that it is itself being (εἶναι) before determinate being (τὸ ὄν). By participating in this being (the εἶναι of the first One; cf. *Parmenides* 137C-142A), the One (scil. "who is," i.e. the second One of *Parmenides* 142B-144E) possesses another being (εἶναι) declined from it (the εἶναι of the Supreme One), (106) which is (what is meant by) participating in determinate being (τὸ ὄν; cf. οὐσία in *Parmenides* 142B). Thus, being (εἶναι) is double: the one preexists determinate being (τὸ ὄν), while the other (ὄν) is derived from the One that is transcendent of determinate being (τὸ ὄν), who is absolute being (εἶναι) and as it were the idea of determinate being (τὸ ὄν) by participation in which (the εἶναι of the first) some other One has come to be to which is linked the being (εἶναι) carried over from it. (*In Parmenidem* XII, 10-35 Hadot 2.102-6)

93. *In Parm.* frg. XII,10-35: Μήποτε δὲ <ὅτι> ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου τὸ δεύτερον, διὰ τοῦτο μεθέξει τοῦ πρώτου τὸ δεύτερον λέγεται <ἕν> εἶναι τοῦ ὅλου τοῦ ἓν εἶναι ἐκ μετοχῆς γεγονότος τοῦ ἑνός· καὶ ἐπεὶ μὴ γέγονεν πρῶτον, εἶτα μετέσχε τοῦ ἑνός, ἀλλ'ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνὸς γεγονὸς ὑφειμένον, οὐκ ἐρρήθη μετασχὸν ἑνός, ἀλλὰ ἓν μετασχὸν τοῦ ὄντος, οὐχ ὅτι τὸ πρῶτον ἦν ὄν, ἀλλ'ὅτι ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἑτερότης περιήγαγεν αὐτὸ εἰς τὸ ἓν εἶναι τὸ ὅλον τοῦτο· ἐξ αὐτοῦ γάρ πως τοῦ δευτέρως γεγονέναι ἓν προσείληφε τὸ εἶναι ἓν.... ὅτι τὸ ἕν τὸ ἐπέκεινα οὐσιας καὶ ὄντος ὂν μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ οὐσία οὐδὲ ἐνέργεια, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ μᾶλλον καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθαρόν, ὥστε καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τὸ πρὸ ὄντος· Οὐ μετασχὸν τὸ <ἕ>ν ἄλλο ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔχει ἐκκλινόμενον τὸ εἶναι, ὅπερ ἐστὶ μετέχειν ὄντος. Ὥστε διττὸν τὸ εἶναι, τὸ μὲν προϋπάρχει τοῦ ὄντος, τὸ δὲ ὃ ἐπάγεται ἐκ τοῦ ὄντος τὸ ἀπόλυτον καὶ ὥσπερ ἰδέα τοῦ ὄντος οὗ μετασχὸν ἄλλο τι ἓν γέγονεν ᾧ σύζυγον τὸ ἀπ'αὐτοῦ ἐπιφερόμενον εἶναι·

The subject here is Plato's treatment of the One-who-is of the second hypothesis (*Parmenides* 142B-145A), "if the One is."[94] If, in addition to an unqualifiable, absolute One unrelated to anything else and completely outside being (the One of the first hypothesis, *Parmenides* 137C-142A), one were to posit a One of which actual existence can be predicated, i.e., a One-who-is or a One-Being, the result is a totality consisting of two coequal parts, namely, "one" and "being," different from one another and different from the absolute first One, though somehow "derived" from it by an "otherness" from the absolute first One. Thus on its own secondary level, the second One or One-Being participates in its own determinate, participial Being (ὄν) derived from but distinct from the absolute infinitival being (εἶναι) of the first One (who itself has no determinate Being or Essence nor act nor any other quality), yet in another sense the second One also participates somehow in the infinitival being that has declined from the first One, as though it enjoyed a vertical participation in its "idea."

Although the fragment of the *Commentary* breaks off at this point, Plato himself (*Parmenides* 143C-143A) goes on to make it clear that each of the resulting parts—One and Being—of the second One-Being is not isolated from the another, but—on the horizontal plane—each mutually participates the other. If each part is to "be," each must again contain two parts, itself and its being: the "one" part contains also "being" and the "being" part contains also "one." As a result, each of the two parts has been separated into two, engendering a process of unending multiplication: the One-Being always becomes two and is never an isolated One, which means that it is limitless in quantity, both one and many.

Although in the *Parmenides* Plato clearly envisaged no relation between the absolute one of the first hypothesis and the One-Being of the second, it appears that this commentator has employed semi-arithmetical schemes of the derivation of multiplicity from primal unity that, like those in Sextus' report of his oral teaching, may go back to speculations on the Old Academy of Plato's day that later became fundamental to the Neopythagorean Platonists of the first two centuries CE. In both the cases of Moderatus and the anonymous *Commentator*, it seems that a

94. I follow the interpretation of G. BECHTLE, *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Berner Reihe philosophischer Studien 22; Bern: Verlag Paul Haupt, 1999), 167-174.

theological interpretation of the *Parmenides* played a crucial role in these speculations.

The author therefore posits two states of Intelligence. Its initial state, transcending the subject-object dichotomy, it is identical with the absolute existence (εἶναι) of the supreme One. Its final state is identical with the determinate being (τὸ ὄν) characteristic of a self-objectivizing, self generating Intellect rather like Numenius' second God; it is no longer simple, but corresponds to a version of the "Chaldaean" triad of Existence (ὕπαρξις), Life or Power, and Intelligence.[95] Each of these is correlated with a distinct phase in the unfolding of Being from the One. In the first phase, Existence is identical with the first (absolute) One; in the second phase, Life is a procession from the One; and in the third stage, Intelligence is now identical with the Intellect or second One, in reversion upon its source, the first One.

Specifically, the unfolding of the second One from the first occurs in three phases or modalities in which each modality of the Intellect predominates at a given phase. First, as a pure infinitival Existence (εἶναι or ὕπαρξις), Intellect is a purely potential Intellect identical with its prefiguration in the absolute being of the supreme first One. In its final phase, it has become identical with the determinate or participial being (τὸ ὄν) of Intellect proper, the second hypostasis; it has now become the hypostatic exemplification of its "idea," the absolute being (τὸ εἶναι) of the One. The transitional phase between the first and final phases of Intellect in effect constitutes a median phase in which Intellect proceeds forth from the first One as an indeterminate Life:[96]

95. P. Hadot thinks that Porphyry was the first to adopt the term ὕπαρξις for the first member of the triad, and that he may have discovered it in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, where it apparently designated the high deity, the Father (cf. Damascius, *Dub. et sol.* 61, I.131,17 Ruelle: ἡ μὲν πρώτη ἀρχὴ κατὰ τὴν ὕπαρξιν θωρεῖται, ὡς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις and 221, II.101,25 Ruelle: ὡς Χαλδαϊκῶς εἰπεῖν, ὁ μὲν νοῦς κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἵσταται μᾶλλον, ἡ δὲ ζωή, κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν, ἡ δὲ οὐσία, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὕπαρξιν). Cf. P. HADOT, "La métaphysique de Porphyre," 140-141 and *Porphyre et Victorinus* 1.255-272.

96. *In Parm.* frg. XIV, 10-26 (Hadot): Ἓν μὲν οὖν ἐστιν καὶ ἁπλοῦν κατὰ τὴν πρώτην καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο αὐτοῦ τὸἀὐτου ἰδέαν, δύναμις ἢ ὅτι καὶ χρὴ ὀνομάζειν ἐνδείξεως <χ>άριν ἄρρητον οὖσαν καὶ ἀνεννόητον, οὐχ ἓν δὲ οὐδὲ ἁπλοῦν κατὰ τὴν ὕπαρξιν καὶ ζωὴν <καὶ> τὴν νόησιν. Καὶ τὸ νοοῦν καὶ τὸ νοούμενον ὑπάρξει, τὸ δὲ νοοῦν, ἣν ὁ νοῦ[ς μετε]ξ[έλθη] ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπάρξεως εἰς τὸ νοοῦν, ἵνα ἐπανέλθῃ εἰς τὸ νοητὸν καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἴδῃ, ἐστὶν ζωή· διὸ ἀόριστος <ὁ> κατὰ τὴν ζωὴν. Καὶ πασῶν οὐσῶν ἐνεργειῶν καὶ ὡς κατὰ μὲν τὴν ὕπαρξιν ἑστῶσα ἂν εἴη ἡ

> Taken in itself as its own idea it—this power, or whatever term one might use to indicate its ineffability and inconceivability [i.e., the potential Intellect still identical with the One]—is one and simple. But with respect to existence (ὕπαρξις), life (ζωή) and thought (νόησις) it (the potential Intellect still identical with the One) is neither one nor simple. Both that which thinks and that which is thought (are) in existence (ὕπαρξις), but that which thinks—if Intellect passes from existence to that which thinks so as to return to the rank of an intelligible and see its (prefigurative) self—is in life. Therefore thinking is indeterminate with respect to life. And all are activities (ἐνεργείαι) such that with respect to existence, activity would be static; with respect to intelligence, activity would be turning to itself; and with respect to life, activity would be turning away from existence. (*In Parmenidem* XIV, 10-26 Hadot 2.110-112)

Intellect is thus a "traveling subject" that deploys itself, or "lives forth" in three phases beginning from the transcendent "being" of the One, conceived as a self-contained static activity altogether beyond either indetermination or determination: first, a stage of indeterminate or infinitival being (εἶναι, ὕπαρξις) interior to the One, a pure act prior to being (τὸ ὄν); second, the going forth of "being in the process of determination," a boundless otherness or trace of life or vitality proceeding from the One; and third, a stage in which this Life becomes defined as determinate or participial being (τὸ ὄν) by an act of (contemplative) reversion upon its own prefiguration or potential being still present in the One. The scheme is like that of the *Oracles* given above:

	1	2	3
The One (εἶναι, ὕπαρξις)	*Existence*	Life or Power	Intelligence
Procession	Existence	*Life*	Intelligence
The One-Being (τὸ ὄν)	Existence	Life	*Intelligence*

Hadot has powerfully argued that the *Commentary* must be after Plotinus, but before Victorinus and Iamblichus, and he finds Porphyry to be the only figure of substance whose doctrine, style, and historical position qualifies him for authorship, an argument that seems to have convinced most scholars. However, there are weighty objections to this ascription. Recently K. Corrigan and G. Bechtle have argued that the *Commentary* is Middle Platonic and pre-Plotinian, while M. Edwards

ἐνέργεια, κατὰ δὲ τὴν νόησιν εἰς αὐτην στραφεῖσα ἐνέργεια, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ζωὴν ἐκ τῆς ὑπαρξεως ἐκνεύσασα ἐνέργεια.

sees it as dependent on Iamblichus.[97] According to Corrigan, the basic grounds for Hadot's thesis are each open to question:

> 1. In response to Hadot's claim that the *Commentary* necessarily presupposes Plotinus' doctrine of the One as well as Plotinus' interpretation of the *Parmenides*, Corrigan points out that these features of Plotinus' thought are not original with him; on Plotinus' own testimony his system of hypostases, including his doctrine of the One and Intellect, was shared by other Middle Platonic thinkers. ("Platonism and Gnosticism" manuscript of 1996, p. 10)
>
> 2. To Hadot's claim that the *Commentary* presupposes Plotinus' doctrine of intellect, but goes far beyond this in deriving a second act of intellect as an unfolding out of an original identity with the primordial unity of the first One, Corrigan argues that "all of the so-called innovations in the *Commentary* are already to be found in Plotinus, and there is a remarkable affinity in thought between Plotinus, Amelius, and the anonymous Commentator that stems from a still earlier tradition of commentary necessitated by the need for an intelligent reading of difficult passages in Plato's

97. See K. CORRIGAN, "Platonism and Gnosticism: The *Anonymous Commentary* on the *Parmenides*, Middle or Neoplatonic?," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 141-177; I here follow the original, rather longer, 1996 manuscript version of this article originally entitled "The anonymous Turin *Commentary* on the *Parmenides* and the Distinction between Essence and Existence in Middle Platonism, Plotinus' Circle, and Sethian Gnostic texts." See also G. BECHTLE, *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Berner Reihe philosophischer Studien 22; Bern: Verlag Paul Haupt, 1999); M. J. EDWARDS, "Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad," *Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 110 (1990), 14-25, and *IDEM*, "Being, Life and Mind: A Brief Inquiry," a paper delivered at the 1995 Oxford Patristics Conference. See also P. HADOT's arguments for Porphyrian authorship of the *Commentary* anticipated in "Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin," *Les sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique V; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 107-157 and articulated fully in "Fragments d'un commentaire de Porphyre sur le Parménide," (*Revue des Études Grecques* 74 [1961], 410-438), "La métaphysique de Porphyre," in *Porphyre* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 12; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1966, 125-157), and the first volume of *Porphyre et Victorinus*; these arguments are accepted by L. ABRAMOWSKI, "Marius Victorinus, Porphyrius und die römischen Gnostiker," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74 (1983), 108-128 and by R. MAJERCIK, "The Being-Life-Mind Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992), 475-488, who also defends Hadot's position in her response to Corrigan's 1995 paper. See now Hadot's most recent defense of his theory, "Porphyre et Victorinus. Questions et hypothèses" in *Res Orientales IX* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1996), 117-125.

Parmenides.[98] Moreover, the doctrine of participation apparently espoused by the commentator in Frs. XI and XII, namely that the Second One receives being from the 'idea' of being which is the Second One's purely substantial vision of the 'First One'[99] is the sort of participation which both Syrianus and Proclus[100] specifically deny to Porphyry, but attribute to earlier Plotinian-circle thought which has its root in Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism (Numenius[101], Cronius, and Amelius). If so, the participation doctrine of the *Commentary* is Plotinian and pre-Plotinian, which means that the *Commentary* is more likely to be Middle Platonist rather than Neoplatonist." ("Platonism and Gnosticism," manuscript of 1996, p. 11)

98. "There is no explicit mention of this in Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*, which we might expect were there a definite Middle Platonic tradition of commentary on the *Parmenides*. However, in discussing the 'logical' and 'metaphysical' interpretations of the *Parmenides*, Proclus appears to refer to Albinus on occasion and perhaps also to Origen the Platonist (*In Parmenidem* 630,37-640,17 Cousin). And in the *VP* (20) Porphyry cites Longinus as saying that Numenius, Cronius, Moderatus, and Thrasyllus wrote on the first principles of Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy. It is true that this is no direct evidence for any commentary on the *Parmenides* itself, but together with the testimony of Simplicius re Moderatus it renders more plausible the hypothesis that this dialogue was not only interpreted 'logically' by Middle Platonists but also given a 'metaphysical' exegesis by Neopythagorean circles. In such a context, the existence not of a tradition of interpretation but of an isolated commentary seems to me quite plausible" (CORRIGAN, "Platonism and Gnosticism," manuscript of 1996, p. 11).

99. I.e., to claim that the Second One receives being from the idea of being which is the First One is to claim that determinate being or beings participate in the highest object of their own vision, i.e. the ideas *qua* unified in the Good. Such participation is not participation in a 'one', but in a one "participating in being (*to on*), not because the first was being (*on*), but because an otherness from the One has turned it around to this whole one-being" (XII 104,17-20). Thus, by participating in the idea of itself "another one has come to be to which is yoked the being borne out from it" (106, 33-35).

100. Syrianus, *In Aristotelis metaphysica commentaria* 109,12-14 [Kroll]; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.33,31 ff. [Diehl]. "While Numenius, Cronius, and Amelius held that both *aesthêta* and *noêta* participated in the Forms, Porphyry held that only *aesthêta* so participated. According to the *Commentary* (frgs. XI-XII, 98-106 Hadot), the Second One receives being from the idea of being which is the First One, which is to say that participation in the First One is simultaneously participation in the generative idea of intellect which is the first moment of intellect's own being; and this is surely to make the equivalent claim that determinate being or beings participate in the highest object of their own vision, i.e., the ideas *qua* unified in the Good. Thus, the commentator tells us that such participation is not participation in a "one," but in a one "participating in being (τὸ ὄν), not because the first was being (ὄν), but because an otherness from the One has turned it around to this whole one-being" (104,17-20). Thus, by participating in the idea of itself "another one has come to be to which is yoked to the being borne out from it" (106,33-35).... this seems much closer to Numenius' notion of participation or even that of Amelius, both of whom introduce participation into the intelligible world (μετουσία in Numenius, frg. 16 des Places). The second Intellect "participates" in the First or, according to Syrianus, the intelligible participates in the highest ideas" (CORRIGAN, Appendix II of "Platonism and Gnosticism: The Anonymous *Commentary* on the *Parmenides*, Middle or Neoplatonic?," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik [SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001], 165-166).

101. E.g., frg. 20 [des Places].

3. Hadot states that while Plotinus in *Ennead* VI, 9 [9] 6 does not affirm that the One is pure thought, Porphyry supposes an absolute, simple, transcendent knowing which has no object and which is identical to the One itself (124). Corrigan suggests that "the two states of intellect theory in the *Commentary*, according to which in Hadot's estimation we are virtually dealing with *two* intellects, is much more comparable to Middle Platonic doctrine (e.g. *Chaldaean Oracles*, Numenius, or even Amelius) as well as to early tendencies in Plotinus' writings to split intellect into two (a 'standing' and a 'moving' intellect, e.g. III, 9 [13] 1, and perhaps V, 4 [7] 2)—for which Plotinus was thought to have appropriated the ideas of Numenius (*VP* 17)—which appears to make the One an intelligible object possessing a content and special self-perception, rather like the static First God in Numenius.[102] In all such Plotinian discourse where a self-awareness or self-reflection of the One is involved (including VI, 9 [9]), the first moment of intellect must as yet be indistinguishable from the One, for it is only when intellect is fully realized that a proper distinctness between source and product can be established." ("Platonism and Gnosticism," manuscript of 1996, p. 21-22)

4. Hadot claims that the commentator uses the being-life-thought triad to describe the dynamic process of Intellect's "autoposition" in a way which is clearly post-Plotinian insofar as this derives from Plotinus' doctrine of the internal identity of subject and object, a unity-in-duality, which springs from intellect's contemplation of the One itself (104; 133 and following). However, Corrigan shows that Plotinus too explores the ambiguity of the "traveling subject in the logic of generation" in a manner similar to the

102. "But how does the Intellect come from the Intelligible object? The Intelligible remains by itself and is not deficient, like that which sees and thinks—I call that which thinks deficient as compared with the Intelligible, but it is not like something senseless; all things belong to it and are in it and with it. It is completely able to discern itself; it has life in itself and all things in itself, and its thinking of itself is itself, and exists by a kind of immediate self-consciousness, in everlasting rest and in a manner of thinking different from the thinking of Intellect" (V, 4 (7) 2, 13-19).

commentator. In *Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 13, 16-21,[103] "Plotinus envisages a three-phase process consisting of 1) an immobile motion, 2) a moment of static identity; and 3) a moment of burgeoning duality based on motion and otherness" which is paralleled by 1) a moment of abidingness (*monê*), coupled with 2) a second moment of a) subsequent procession b) autoconstitution. Corrigan submits that such arguments in Plotinus are quite likely already formulaic in the Neopythagorean language of procession and conversion (e.g., Moderatus) and the tradition of deriving a dyad from a monad (e.g., Nicomachus, Theon). ("Platonism and Gnosticism," manuscript of 1996, p. 14)

5. "Contrary to Hadot's view, the structure of intellect in its derivation from the One is comparable in both Plotinus and the *Commentary*, and *zôê* does appear as a middle term (an 'outgoing *energeia*') between being as the highest unity of intellect abiding in the One and the full unfolding of intellect proper in the *Enneads* (III, 8 [30] 8-10). However, *hyparxis* does not appear in this technical usage. The question is: what weight should we give its absence? *Hyparxis* denotes existence in Sextus Empiricus, Galen, Alexander of Aphrodisias, the verb occurs in Numenius and the Chaldean Oracles, and compounds of *hyparchein* occur in Plotinus to denote original existence and even pre-existence. The lack of the explicit triad in Plotinus might count as evidence that the explicit triad is late and post-Plotinian or, on the other hand, that it is Chaldean and Middle Platonic and from an earlier stage of development than Plotinus represents. However, Damascius' frequent attestation of an explicit Chaldaic triad, existence—power—intellect weighs the balance in favor of the latter view in spite of Hadot's unproven suggestion that, although *hyparxis* may already have been substituted for *pater* in the *Oracles*, the technical usage originated with Porphyry.... I think it most likely that the *Commentary* is a pre-Plotinian Platonic work in the Neopythagorean tradition of interpretation but building upon the Middle Platonic intellect-interpretation of Albinus and others—in fact just the sort of commentary which Porphyry tells us in the *VP* 14 was actually read in Plotinus' school" ("Platonism and Gnosticism," manuscript of 1996, pp. 24-25, 27).

Corrigan's conclusion is clear:

103. "If a simple moves, it holds that alone and either it is the same and has not proceeded or, if it has proceeded, another remains, so that there are two. And if 'this' is the same as 'that', it remains [one] and has not gone forward; but if different, it has gone forth with difference and made from something same and something different, a third One." ('Απλοῦν δὴ εἰ κινοῖτο, ἐκεῖνο μόνον ἔχει· καὶ ἢ αὐτὸ καὶ οὐ προῦβη εἰς οὐδέν, ἢ εἰ προῦβη, ἄλλο μένον· ὥστε δῦο· καὶ εἰ ταὐτὸν ἐκεῖνῳ, μένει ἕν καὶ οὐ προελήλυθεν, εἰ δ'ἕτερον, προῆλθε μετὰ ἑτερότητος καὶ ἐποίησεν ἐκ ταὐτοῦ τινος καὶ ἑτέρου τρίτον ἕν). Cf. also V, 2 [11] 1, 7-9.

There is, therefore, less and less reason to believe that Porphyry is necessarily the author of the anonymous *Commentary*. All the evidence indicates that the doctrines of the *Commentary* are perfectly compatible with Middle Platonist thought and also with some important passages in the *Enneads* which themselves in turn relate to earlier Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean doctrines. My preliminary conclusion here, then, is that we should take Plotinus' own word in V, 1 (10) as sufficient assurance that the vast majority of his doctrines are not original with him. What we see in Plotinus is a new way of doing philosophy (one of course very much related to the *palaia philosophia* of Plato and Aristotle), and not the sort of doxography which might permit us to establish a *terminus a quo* on this issue. The straightforward evidence then should be given more weight: the *Commentary* is anonymous and there is nothing in it which could not be Middle Platonic. Conspicuous doctrines of the *Commentary* appear in certain Sethian Gnostic texts which appear to be (very roughly) contemporary with Plotinus. Therefore, it is more reasonable to suppose, if there is nothing to the contrary, that the *Commentary* is pre-Plotinian. ("Platonism and Gnosticism," manuscript of 1996, p. 24)

We will touch again upon the *Commentary* in Chapter 10, in the context of some observations about Porphyry, after a brief consideration of the founder of the Neoplatonic school, Plotinus.

CHAPTER TEN

EARLY NEOPLATONIC SPECULATION ON FIRST PRINCIPLES

The following treatment of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Theodore of Asine cannot hope to do any justice to the complexity of the thought of these figures, especially Plotinus, whose œuvre and the scholarship devoted to it are immense. The purpose of this survey is merely to provide the metaphysical context in which the special features of the Platonizing Sethian treatises may be better understood. Disproportionate space is given to the doctrines of Theodore of Asine—certainly a minor figure in comparison to these other three—primarily because his metaphysics and his alphanumeric speculation on the cosmic soul resembles that found in the Sethian treatise *Marsanes*.

I. PLOTINUS

One of the accomplishments of later Middle Platonism was the recognition that the chain of the derivation of the pluriform world from an original unity—which Neopythagoreans attempted to articulate by introducing a principle of multiplicity, change, alteration, and becoming—had to account not only for cosmic pluriformity but also for cosmic life and intelligence. Confronted by the Parmenidean opposition between the static realm of true being—apprehensible by mind alone through reason—and the realm of becoming—apprehensible by body through sensation—it was a central problem for the "friends of the forms" even in Plato's day to conceive how thought—an activity of soul as the principle of change and motion—could have a place in the ideal transcendent world of stable being: if the truly real were devoid of life and any sort of movement, thought would be impossible (*Sophist* 248E-249A):[1]

> Are we really to be so easily persuaded that change, life, soul and intelligence have no place in the perfectly real (παντελῶς ὄν), that is has neither

1. In effect, the realm of true being and the ideas is distinguished from the static and undifferentiated Parmenidean/Eleatic One of 244B-245E not only by pluriformity, but by movement and vitality.

> life (ζωή) nor intelligence (νοῦς), but stands aloof devoid of intelligence (φρόνησις)?

While the historical Parmenides concluded that the equation of that-which-is with that-which-can-be-thought (τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι, frg. 3 [Diels-Kranz] = Plotinus, *Ennead* V, 1 [10] 8.17) implied a total lack of becoming, both Plato and Aristotle realized that pure being cannot be completely inert and lifeless; thought must be alive, since thinking is the coming into being of the objects of thought. Likewise, in order to be known, being must be affected and thus be in some kind of motion in a living and thinking context.

This important observation clearly calls for an interpretation of the process- or movement-oriented language implied by intellect and thought, as recognized also by Aristotle, to the effect that by participation in the intelligible, intellect thinks itself. Becoming the intelligent recipient of substance and intelligible object, it acts in "having" them, and that act is a kind of seeing. Rather than a static state of merely containing the objects of intellection, in God the activity of thought is life; indeed God *is* that activity:

> And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is capable of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the substance, is thought. And it is active when it possesses this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God is in a better state. And life also belongs to God (καὶ ζωή δέ γε ὑπάρξει); for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality (ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωή, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια); and God's essential actuality is life most good and eternal (ἐνέργεια δὲ ἡ καθ' αὑτὴν ἐκείνου ζωὴ ἀρίστη καὶ ἀίδιος). We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God (φαμὲν δὴ τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ζῷον ἀίδιον ἄριστον, ὥστε ζωὴ καὶ αἰὼν συνεχὴς καὶ ἀίδιος ὑπάρξει τῷ θεῷ· τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ θεός). (*Metaphysics* XII 1072b20-30)

In the early third century CE this had become an accepted fact: Plotinus himself emphasized the character of true being as life and the character of thought as life when he averred that Intellect is not a lifeless being, but an act (*Ennead* V, 3 [49] 5,33-44; cf. V, 5 [32] 2,9-13; VI, 9 [9] 9,17; II, 5 [25] 3,36). Thus on the basis of the *Sophist* and of Aristotle, two propositions stand: Being has Life, and Mind has Life.

In addition to the Sophist passage, another key Platonic passage dealing with the relation between life and intelligence is *Timaeus* 39E:

> Nous beholds (καθορᾷ) the ideas resident in the truly living being (ὃ ἔστι ζῷον); such and so many as exist therein (ἐνούσας) he purposed (διενοήθη) that the universe should contain.

Contemporary Middle Platonic exegesis of the sort found in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Numenius, Alcinous, and Maximus, took the *Timaeus* passage to imply at least two intelligences or gods, one inert—the truly living being—the other active—the demiurgic Nous. It is ironic that the first God of these thinkers, an inert intelligence (νοῦς νοητός, νοῦς ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ), was found in the "living being" of the *Timaeus*. Instead, the active, living intelligence was conceived as a second God, a demiurgic intellect, regarded as double: as contemplative intellect (νοῦς νοοῦν, νοῦς θεωρητικός, cf. καθορᾷ), it is directed upwards in contemplation of the first God, the inert intelligence, and as the planning intellect (νοῦς διανοούμενος) it is directed downward to its creation as source of life and soul.

A. Middle Platonic Structuring of Intellect and Origins of the Being-Mind-Life Triad

On the basis of *Timaeus* 39E, in the second century Numenius conceived his second God as a divine intellect generating itself and the sensible cosmos by a contemplative "seeing" of the first God (called αὐτοόν in frg. 17 des Places) who thinks only insofar as he makes use of a contemplative second God (frgs. 20-22 des Places); by preoccupation with matter this second God gives rise to a third planning intellect. In this scheme, it is the second God that is the source of life. Note the implicit triad (in the "non-canonical" order) of Being, Mind, and Life. According to fragment 12,

> Our journey begins when the divine intellect is sent on a traversal (ἐν διεξόδῳ) to all those appointed to share in it; whenever the (second) God looks and turns toward each of us, the consequence is that life (ζῆν) results and bodies live (βιώσκεσθαι), tended by God's far-shooting rays. Yet whenever he turns again towards his watchtower, all this is extinguished, while the (divine) Mind continues to live a blissful life (ζῆν βίου εὐδαίμονος). (Numenius, frg. 12 des Places)

In fragment 16, the second God as demiurge spontaneously produces both his own form and the world, and then becomes completely contemplative.[2]

A somewhat similar notion occurs also in Alcinous' identification of Plato's demiurge with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, which in effect equates the Ideas, the *Timaeus*' Living Creature, and demiurgic intelligence itself (*Didaskalikos* X.2-3 [164 Hermann]). On the transcendental level, as "Father," God orders everything (intellect and the soul of the cosmos) by his very being. On the level of will, however, the transcendent ordering reaches into the cosmic soul, awakening and turning it back to the Father as its intelligibility. As a result of this turning (a kind of ἐπιστροφή), the soul of the world is rendered intellectual (*Didaskalikos* X.3 [165, 2-3 Hermann]), and being properly ordered, herself sets the world in order (κοσμηθεὶς ... διακοσμεῖ).

As noted in Chapter 9, Plotinus' disciple Amelius too dealt similarly with the theme of transcendental intellectual movement. On the basis of *Timaeus* 39E, Amelius divided the activity of the divine intelligence into the three phases of "being" (from ὅ ἐστι ζῷον), "having" (from ἐνούσας), and "seeing" (from καθορᾷ), the last of which is "source of souls" (πηγὴ ψυχῶν, Proclus, *In Tim.* I.309,18).

2. P. Hadot, "Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin," *Les sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique V; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 135, refers to the Stoic doctrine of τονικὴ κίνησις, an alternating inward and outward movement guaranteeing the constancy of the universal Pneuma/Logos; movement toward the interior produces the unity, coherence and substance of individual things, while outward movement produces their size, and qualities (cf. Philo, *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini* 68, *Legum allegoriarum* 1.30; Alexander Aphrodisias *De Anima* 131; Simplicius, *In Aristotelis categorias commentarium* 269,14-16 [Kalbfleisch]; Nemesius, *De natura hominis* 2 [*PG* 40.540a9]). The transposition of this doctrine from the Stoic physical plane to the Platonic metaphysical plane provides a way of deriving the substance and unity of determinate being from a reversion upon its source resulting from attraction to a vital center from which it has emanated. Thus in Numenius, the second god dispenses life as it turns toward matter, and enjoys the contemplative life in turning toward the first God. Aristotle mentions an Old Pythagorean derivation of the number One according to which, when the One had been constructed, immediately the nearest part of the Unlimited (ἀπειρία) began to be drawn or breathed in and limited by Limit (Aristotle, *Met.* XIV 1091a13-19: οἱ μὲν οὖν Πυθαγόρειοι ... φανερῶς γὰρ λέγουσιν ὡς τοῦ ἑνὸς συσταθέντος εἴτ' ἐξ ἐπιπέδων εἴτ' ἐκ χροιᾶς εἴτ' ἐκ σπέρματος εἴτ' ἐξ ὧν ἀποροῦσιν εἰπεῖν εὐθὺς τὸ ἔγγιστα τοῦ ἀπείρου ὅτι εἵλκετο καὶ ἐπεραίνετο ὑπὸ τοῦ πέρατος). In Numenius, however, the limiting principle draws in or contracts itself; see Chapter 9 on Moderatus.

Perhaps under the influence of Numenius (cf. frgs. 11, 13, 15, 16 des Places), the early Plotinus himself played with such a tripartition of the divine intellect (*Ennead* III, 9 [13] 1), distinguishing three aspects: a static contemplated mind, an active contemplating one, and a third, discursive or planning one. However, in *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 1; 9.6.14-24 at the end of his antignostic *Großschrift* (*Ennead* III, 8 [30]; V, 8 [31]; V, 5 [32]; II, 9 [33]), he attributed this view to the Gnostics and abandoned it in favor of equating the lower, planning intellect with his Soul-hypostasis and interpreting the upper (inert) contemplated and (active) contemplating intellects as two indivisible phases of his Intellect-hypostasis. In general, it appears that there is a tendency among Middle Platonists and even Plotinus to locate the originally paradigmatic truly living being of *Timaeus* 39E as a vitalizing principle at the lower perimeter of the metaphysical hierarchy such that it could be identified with the world soul or a similar entity responsible for animating the individual beings occupying the sensible world. Of course, this raises the question of the nature of the suprajacent intellectual principle, to which Plotinus emphatically ascribed not only Being and Intellect, but also Life. In *Ennead* VI, 6 [34] 8,1-2, Plotinus characterizes Intellect: "There is a living being (ζῷον) that is primal and is therefore self-living (αὐτοζῷον); there is both Intellect (νοῦς) and truly existing being (οὐσία ἡ ὀντῶς)." The life of intellect is both the medium of its derivation from the One and the mediator of the unity of its thinking and being, since it is both its own thinking and object of thought.

As we will see in the subsequent discussion of the divine hierarchy in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, it is clear that the structure of the Aeon of Barbelo is precisely similar to this Middle Platonic noology: as the universal intellect, the Aeon of Barbelo consists of a contemplated intellect (the Kalyptos Aeon), a contemplating intellect (the Protophanes Aeon), and a demiurgic intellect (the Autogenes Aeon). Since these Sethian Aeons contain not merely intellectual essences, but also souls, and since the Sethian treatises are centered on the experience of salvific ascent and therefore the transition of souls from one level to the other, the figure of the Triple Male Child is introduced as a facilitator of these transitions.

B. The Derivational Application of the Being-Mind-Life Triad in Plotinus

While *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and the *Three Steles of Seth* locate the derivational triad Existence, Life/Vitality, and Mentality/Blessedness beyond the intellectual realm of the Barbelo Aeon, Plotinus located a functional, "noological" triad of Being, Mind, and Life entirely within his second hypostasis, Intellect, so as to express the self-living unity of its thinking and object of thought.[3] Just as in these Platonizing Sethian texts, so also throughout the *Enneads* one finds a good deal of variability in the order or rank of the last two terms of the triad. The order Being-Life-Mind seems more characteristic of his earlier treatises (V, 4 [7] 2,39-44; VI, 9 [9] 2,21-25), but is also found in later ones (VI, 6 [34] 15,1-3; 6.18,29-36; VI, 7 [38] 3,8-11; 16,6-22; 17,6-43). For Plotinus generally, one might especially expect the order Being-Mind-Life, mainly because the last term naturally points downward to the fundamental Life principle of his system, the immediately subjacent hypostasis of Soul e.g., *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6,14-19 and III, 6 [26] 6,21-28. In the treatise *On Numbers* written immediately after the *Großschrift*, Plotinus tends to change the order of the Being-Life-Mind triad that dominates the structure of the divine Intellect in the earlier treatises to the Being-Mind-Life order earlier implicit in Numenius and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, apparently on the grounds that the truly living being, "that which has life," represents a more diverse multiplicity than do being and mind, e.g., VI, 6 [34] 8,17-22:

> First, then, we take Being as first in order; then Mind, then that which has Life (τὸ ζῷον), for this appears already to "contain all things" (*Timaeus* 31A4), and Mind, as the act of Being, is second. Thus it is clear that numbers cannot depend upon that which has Life, since unity and duality existed before that, nor would it depend on Mind, as before that was Being, which is both one and many.

There seems to be a development in Plotinus' interpretation of this "living being" (τὸ ζῷον) in the *Timaeus*. In the early *Ennead* III, 9 [13] 1, the living being occupies the summit of three intellects: "Αλλοις δὲ δόξει τὰ τρία ἓν εἶναι, τὸ ζῳον αὐτὸ ὅ ἐστιν (a first intellect ἐν στάσει καὶ ἑνότητι καὶ ἡσυχίᾳ) ὁ νοῦς (i.e., a second intellect that contemplates (ὁρῶν) the first one, as a certain ἐνέργεια of it), τῶ διανοούμενον (the demiurgic intellect who copies what he sees in the second to make the four kinds of living beings).[4] Then at the end of the *Großschrift*, Plotinus attributes such views to the Gnostics. Finally in VI, 6 [34] 8,17-22 (cited above) and VI, 2 [43] 21-22, he places the "living being" in third place at the level of his intellectual hypostasis. Indeed, we will see that such a variation in the order of the terms in this triad occurs also in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, so it is possible that Plotinus' encounter with gnostic thought was one of the factors that caused him shift his emphasis on an apparently earlier sequence Being-Life-Mind to an emphasis on the sequence Being-Mind-Life, not to mention the distinctiveness of alternative metaphysical contexts in which the focus alternates between the process by which being is originally *derived* and how it is finally *deployed*.[5]

C. Traces of the Derivational Application of the Being-Life-Mind Triad in Plotinus

Despite Plotinus' general restriction of the Being-Life-Mind triad to a description of the function and structure of Intellect, the second hypostasis of his metaphysics, there are less explicit, but definite traces of the appearance of elements of this triad operating at a higher level, where they are used to explain the derivation of Intellect from the One. This was a delicate subject for Plotinus: how can anything remotely multiple derive from the utterly transcendent and self-complete unity of the One, who can properly be described only in the familiar terms of negative predication:[6]

3. The classic work on this subject is P. HADOT, "Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin," *Les sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique V; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 107-157.

4. Against a static and moving phase of intellect: II, 9 [33] 1,26-27: οὐδ' ἐπινοεῖν τὸν μέν τινα νοῦν ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ τινί, τὸν δὲ οἷον κινούμενον; against a three-phase intellect in 6,19-22: Οἱ δὲ οὐ συνέντες τὸν μὲν ἓλαβον ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ ἔχοντα ἐν αὐτῷ πάντα τὸ ὄντα, τὸν δὲ νοῦν ἕτερον παρ' αὐτὸν θεωροῦντα, τὸν δὲ διανοούμενον—πολλάκις δὲ αὐτοῖς ἀντὶ τοῦ διανοουμένου ψυχή ἐστιν ἡ δημιουργοῦσα.

5. See below under the discussion of Theodore of Asine, p. 437.

6. Γεννητικὴ γὰρ ἡ τοῦ ἑνὸς φύσις οὖσα τῶν πάντων οὐδέν ἐστιν αὐτῶν. Οὔτε οὖν τι οὔτε ποιὸν οὔτε ποσὸν οὔτε νοῦν οὔτε ψυχήν· οὐδὲ κινούμενον οὐδ' αὖ ἑστώς, οὐκ ἐν τόπῳ, οὐκ ἐν χρόνῳ, <ἀλλ' αὐτὸ> καθ' αὐτὸ μονοειδές, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀνείδεον πρὸ εἴδους ὂν παντός, πρὸ κινήσεως, πρὸ στάσεως· ταῦτα γὰρ περὶ τὸ ὄν, ἃ πολλὰ αὐτὸ ποιεῖ.

> Thus the One is neither something nor a quality, nor a quantity nor an intellect nor a soul; neither is it moving nor even standing, it is not in place, not in time, but one of a kind by itself; rather it is formless before all form, before movement and before stability, since these relate to being and would make it many. (*Ennead* VI, 9 [9] 3,40-45 [Armstrong])

Nevertheless, Plotinus hypothesized that the One must contain some kind of potency or activity that gives rise to the realm of determinate being, an indeterminate dyadic character or activity or movement that can be called "otherness" or "life." The chain of reasoning by which Plotinus arrives at this notion is admirably summarized by D. J. O'Meara:[7] noting that, in his account of the derivation of the realm of defined being from the One that is utterly beyond being, Plotinus often resorts to biological images, O'Meara observes:

> In *Ennead* V, 4 [7] 1, Plotinus observes that living things, when they reach maturity, the perfection of their nature, normally procreate (4.1.25-30). A major theme in Aristotle's biology, this principle extends for Plotinus both down to inorganic things and up to the divine, for the divine, as Plato says (*Timaeus* 29E), is not envious: it is generous and gives of itself. It seems generally true then that when things reach maturity or perfection they procreate or give of themselves in some way. Since the One represents the highest perfection, surely it would not remain in selfish isolation, giving nothing of itself, but would be abundantly productive. Plotinus goes on to note a general pattern in things that are productive. The cases of fire giving off heat (V 4.2.27-33), the sun giving off light, and snow giving off cold (V, 1 [10] 6.28-35) are claimed to be examples of a wider pattern: each substance (e.g. fire) has a primary (or internal) activity proper to itself and gives rise to a secondary activity (e.g. heat) external to, or different from, the primary activity. Even if the One is strictly speaking not a thing or a substance, it is plausible that the structure of primary and secondary activities found in lower things applies also in its case and that the absolutely simple activity which it is gives rise to a secondary activity which is different from it.
>
> What is this secondary activity of the One? Plotinus identifies it with the indefinite dyad mentioned in the Aristotelian reports on Plato, and names it "intelligible matter," an anomalous designation insofar as it is not the receptacle of concrete being, but something prior to it. Since it is not susceptible of differentiation, it guarantees the unity of its product, the Intellect, and also enables it to exist as something other than the One. Plotinus then interprets this dyad as the undefined potentiality which, in Aristotle's theory of thinking, becomes determined or actualized by objects of thought. The object of thought that defines the indeterminate potentiality, making it intellect, is the One. However, the One is not such as to be thinkable, since it is neither determinate nor manifold. The dyad which is the One's secondary activity must then 'turn toward' the One and think of it as thinkable, as rendered determinate and manifold.[8] The result is the self-thought that is divine intellect. Divine intellect is a knowing of the unknowable: it knows the One as knowing itself, a determinate manifold expression of the One in the indeterminate potentiality to think that is the One's secondary activity....[9]
>
> The concept of a lower entity turning toward and contemplating a higher being so as to be inspired by it is anticipated in Aristotle's solution to the problem of how divine intellect moves others without moving: it does so as an object of thought and love which inspires imitation in the heavenly bodies (*Metaphysics*, 12.7 [1072b]). Alcinous adopts this solution (*Didaskalikos* chs. 10.3, 14.3): his first god, a divine intellect, acts by inspiring a lower god to turn toward, contemplate, and imitate it ... this approach ... allows the One to be responsible for processes without requiring any change in it.

7. D. J. O'MEARA, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 63-65.

D. The Indefinite Dyad and Higher and Lower Matter

The basis of Plotinus' emanative metaphysics is a triad consisting of the One, the indefinite Dyad and the Intellect (νοῦς).[10] This foundational triad tends to be obscured, because Plotinus conceives the Dyad, not as a distinct hypostasis or principle, but rather as an undefined primary movement, otherness, impulse, or trace of life emanating from the superabundance of the One that takes on determinate existence as Intellect

8. As O'Meara (65) notes: "Here Plotinus draws upon the Pythagorean idea, to be found in Plato (*Philebus* 16C-17A, 23C-D) and Aristotle (*Met.* 1.5-6 [986a-987b]), of a principle of limit that delimits or articulates what is indeterminate," although it is hard to see how the One, which is without form or determination, can act as a principle of determination.

9. In fact, of these two activities, one internal to an essence and another that emanates from it (V, 4 [7] 2,28; II, 9 [33] 8,22-23), Plotinus calls the latter both a "first" (πρώτη) activity (VI, 7 [38] 18,41) and a "second" activity (IV, 5 [29] 7,14-21), a "first life, an activity in departure" (ζωὴ πρώτη. ἐνέργεια οὖσα ἐν διεξόδῳ, III, 8 [30] 9,30-40), an ἀπόρροια from the One (III, 4 [15] 3,26-27), and it is this activity that he identifies with Life (VI, 7 [38] 17,11). See P. HADOT, *Plotin: Traité 38 VI, 7: Introduction, traduction, commentaire et notes* (Les Écrits de Plotin; Cerf, 1988), 274-275.

10. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 337 n. 532.

by turning back upon its source in an act of vision.[11] That the One contains such a dyadic otherness seems to have been anticipated in Plato's "unwritten" doctrine, which Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. math.* 10.261) attributes to certain Pythagoreans: "And [the One], when conceived in self-identity (αὐτότης, i.e. absolutely) is a Monad, but when in its otherness (ἑτερότης) it is added to itself, it creates the Indefinite Dyad." For Plotinus, as it emanates from the One, this otherness takes on limit and definition as the second hypostasis, Intellect, at the point where it contemplatively turns back toward the source from which it was emitted. In V, 2 [11] 1,7-9, the superabundant perfection of the One overflows and makes "another" (ἄλλο), which product turns back to the One (and to *itself*), is "filled" and becomes Intellect by looking towards it (or its prefigurative self): "this product has turned again to it (or: itself) and been filled and has become its [note the ambiguity] contemplator." A similar notion is found in the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*:

> It has not been said that Being participates in the One, but that the One participates in Being, not because the first was Being (τὸ ὄν), but because an otherness (ἑτερότης) from the One has turned the One towards this whole One-Being (τὸ ἓν εἶναι). For from the fact of being engendered somehow at the second level, being-One (τῷ ἓν εἶναι) is added. (*In Parmenidem* XII 16-22 Hadot 2.104)

Eventually, the unmastered or unreverted portion of this indefinite otherness ends up as ordinary Matter at the bottom of the cosmic scale, as the principle of evil conceived as a mere image of intelligible Matter, utterly deprived of goodness, life and intelligence, a "decorated corpse" (νεκρὸν κεκοσμένον, *Ennead* II, 4.5,18).

In his early to middle treatises, Plotinus employs a three-stage deployment of defined reality from the One, employing concepts reminiscent of the Old Academicians and the Neopythagorean arithmologists.[12]

11. The principle passages containing Plotinus' doctrine of the dyad are: *Ennead* II, 4 [12] 5,15-23; 5,28-30; 10,4-11; 11,33-43; 15,14-28; V, 1 [10] 5,6-19; and especially VI, 7 [38] 17,6-43. Cf. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 313-314.

12. According to J. BUSSANICH, "Plotinus' metaphysics of the One," *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. L. P. Gerson (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 51: "Plotinus refers to this potential, inchoate state or pre-Intellect in various terms, which we can classify into two groups: (i) the indefinite dyad (V.1.5-6, V.4.2.7-8), motion (*kinêsis*: V.6.5.8, VI.7.16.16-18), otherness (II.4.5.28-30); (ii) potentiality (*dunamis*: III.8.11.2), desire (*ephêsis*: V.3.11.2, V.6.5.10), indefinite life (*zôê*: VI.7.16.14-15, 17.13), indefinite seeing (V.3.11.12, V.4.2.6, V.6.5.10, VI.7.17.14-15), and intelligible matter (II.4-5.24-37). The sources of these terms are, roughly: (i) the Platonic 'greatest kinds,' namely, Otherness and Motion as well as the late Academic indefinite dyad, and (ii) 'Aristotelian' matter and potentiality (in the cognitive model of actualization, desire and vision are potentialities). The actualization of this first, potential stage in the life of Intellect occurs by means of the One's final causality."

Throughout *Ennead* II, 4 [12], "On Matter," Plotinus discusses a feminine generative principle called "Intelligible Matter" or the "Indefinite" or the "Dyad" or the "Unlimited," and he explicitly associates it with Plato's Receptacle, although he never refers to it by Plato's epithet "Mother." It is a primal otherness in the neighborhood of the One, the Great and Small of Plato's unwritten teaching as preserved by Aristotle, an indefiniteness, not yet good, immediately prior to its turning to the one and receiving definition and illumination; it is a potentiality continually actualized and informed. For instance, in II, 4 [12] 5, intellect is the end product of a movement and otherness that emerge from the First; they were indefinite (ἀόριστον) as from the First, but defined when they turn back to it. Here the median term is an implicit duality, an "indefinite dyad," not yet fully formed, that emanates from the One to form defined Being. Previous Platonism under the influence of Aristotle seems to have held some form of matter responsible for the diversity within the realm of ideas, and Plotinus too may have reasoned that, to account for the peculiar form that makes one Idea different from another, there must be something that is "formed" and receives the difference; therefore, there must be matter in the realm of the ideas.

According to *Ennead* II, 4 [12], 15,14-28, "in the intelligible world, too, matter is the unlimited, and it would be produced from the unlimitedness or power or the everlastingness of the One; unlimitedness does not exist in the One, but the One produces it." Later, in *Ennead* II, 5 [25], 3,8-13 he defends "those who posit matter in the realm of the intelligible" as if he had never held this notion, but even later in *Ennead* V, 5 [32], 5,6-19 he can still say:

> For number is not primary: the One is prior to the Dyad, but the Dyad is secondary and, originating from the One, has it as definer, but is itself of its own nature indefinite; but when defined, it is already a number, but a number as substance; and Soul, too, is a number.... Therefore what is called number in the intelligible world and the Dyad are rational principles and Intellect; but the Dyad is indefinite when one forms an idea of it by what

> may be called the substrate, but each and every number which comes from it and the One is a form ...

On the other hand, Plotinus developed a notion of a lower, sensible matter, which K. Corrigan has shown to have arisen in Plotinus' dialogue with both Aristotle's criticisms of Plato and the Gnostic's notion of an evil creator figure.[13] Against Aristotle's characterization of matter as an indefinite substratum, Plotinus maintains that matter is privation itself, and that matter's receipt of form, far from entailing its extinction, is instead its means of actualization and perfection. Furthermore, indefiniteness cannot be an accidental attribute of a material substrate, since indefiniteness can only be attributed to something limited, like a body or a form; thus indefiniteness is what matter is. As with Plato's Receptacle, nothing can enter into and change matter from what it is. On a Platonic interpretation, Plotinus shows that, short of its uttermost distance from the One, matter's privation is also positive insofar as privation is a kind of potentiality necessary for the receipt of form. Against the notion of an ignorant world creator as source of cosmic evil, Plotinus argues that the source of evil is not to be found in any proactive evil agent (demiurge, soul, logos or Sophia) but in the privated character of matter. Like Plato's Receptacle, matter is always potentially receptive of form and never actual, and therefore cannot be an independent, irreconcilable principle of evil.

Corrigan further observes that, according to *Ennead* II, 4 [12] 1, matter is generated by the lower, partial soul as an absolute indefiniteness with the potentiality of receiving form and becoming a body, a view that squares with *Ennead* II, 4. This generation is not a sinful inclination of soul, as Plotinus' Gnostic audience may be inclined to think, but is a natural function of soul. In *Ennead* IV, 8 [6], 6, Plotinus argues with a hidden interlocutor, quite possibly a Gnostic, that whether matter is to be conceived as an eternal principle independent of any other (more or less like Plato's indefinite Dyad) or whether it was generated by a prior

13. K. CORRIGAN, "Positive and Negative Matter in Later Platonism: The Uncovering of Plotinus' dialogue with the Gnostics," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 19-56. See now his magisterial *Plotinus' Theory of Matter-Evil and the Question of Substance: Plato, Aristotle, and Alexander of Aphrodisias* (Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale, Supplementa 3; Leuven: Éditions Peeters, 1996).

principle and then compelled to be separate, matter must be taken as able to participate in the good.

I suggest that here Plotinus may have in mind the view of Moderatus of Gades, that matter is primal quantity produced by the monadic unitary Logos' eidetic self-privation of all unitary characteristics, and as such does not participate, but only receives a reflection (ἔμφασις) of the Forms retained in the Monad. On the other hand, in II, 9 [33] 3, Plotinus clearly counters a Gnostic view of matter as a lower principle eternally separate from those above it (even though it be a consequence of their existence) by raising the objectionable implication that the higher beings would thus be hemmed in by something less than they.

According to *Ennead* II, 5 [25] 5, the generation of matter by the partial Soul (the lowest part of the World Soul which is yet higher than the realm of bodies) is set into the context of the emanation of Intellect and Soul from the One. Emanating as the otherness proximate to the One, matter is the unilluminated residue remaining after its expulsion from the Intelligible and its passage through the stage of precosmic matter at the lower bound of the intelligible realm and through the stage of cosmic or sensible matter as the substrate of corporeal objects. Primal otherness is thus "caught" at both the intelligible and sensible levels, so as to form, first, things like numbers and shapes, and later, sensible bodies. Matter *per se* is that portion of otherness that has escaped, or, to use language reminiscent of the lower Sophia in the Valentinian myth of Ptolemaeus, has been "cast out and separated" from the realm of being. Though taking its origin from the One, it is still the partial soul that most proximately generates and informs matter. When matter is apprehended by the intelligible, the product is a spiritual being, perhaps a daemon or the creative soul descending into indefiniteness, in turn producing images of intelligible reality in the perceptible realm, such as the stars, animals, and plants, all the way down to inanimate nature.

Again, I suggest that some of this sounds a bit like Moderatus, who characterized matter as a turning away from intelligible and perceptible species towards non-being; it flees from the good, but is caught by it at the level of the intelligible and psychic realm and rendered eidetic in the form of numbers and geometrical shapes, and is not permitted to "overstep its boundaries." Just as Moderatus had defined matter at the transcendent level as primal Quantity derived from the self-privation of the second One, and at the sensible level as its inferior shadow in flight

from the Good, so also Plotinus posits a higher and positive intelligible matter spontaneously sprung as otherness from the One, and a lower and negative matter as its sensible, indeed evil, image that has extended so far from its source that it has become deprived of any trace of the Good.

E. Life

Beginning in the middle treatises and especially after the production of his *Großschrift* (chronologically 30-33) against the Gnostics around the year 265 CE, Plotinus seems to abandon traditional Platonic terminology such as intelligible "Matter" and the "indefinite Dyad." The higher, intelligible matter becomes defined as intelligent life (VI, 5 [23] 12,1-11; VI, 7 [38] 17,6-43; cf. II, 4 [12] 5,15-18). The connection between life and the indefiniteness of the dyad becomes clear in V, 4 [7] 2,4-26 where intellect is virtually defined as "bounded life":

> Thinking, which sees the Intelligible and turns toward it and is, in a way, being perfected by it, is itself indefinite like seeing, but is defined by the Intelligible. This is why it is said: from the Indefinite Dyad and the One derive the Forms and Numbers: that is, Intellect. For this reason Intellect is not simple but many; it manifests a composition, of course an intelligible one, and already sees many things. It is, certainly, also an intelligible, but it thinks as well: so it is already two. And it is also a different intelligible by being posterior to the One itself. But how does this Intellect come from the Intelligible? The Intelligible remains by itself and is not deficient, like that which sees and thinks—I call that which thinks deficient as compared with the Intelligible, but it is not like something senseless; all things belong to it and are in it and with it. It is completely able to discern itself; it has life in itself and all things in itself, and its thinking of itself is itself, and it exists by a kind of immediate self-consciousness, in everlasting rest and in a manner of thinking different from the thinking of Intellect. If, then, something comes into being while the Intelligible abides in itself, it comes into being from it when it is most of all what it is. When, therefore, the Intelligible abides "in its own proper way of life" (*Tim.* 42E5-6), that which comes into being does come into being from it, but from it as it abides unchanged. Since, therefore, it abides as Intelligible, what comes into being does so as thinking: and since it is thinking and thinks that from which it came—for it has nothing else—it becomes Intellect, like another intelligible and like that Principle, a representation and image of it. (*Ennead* V, 4 [7] 2,4-26 Armstrong).

In these later treatises, the term ζωή dominates in derivational discussion. Thus in III, 8 [30] 9,1-50 and VI, 6 [34] 9,39-40, there is a triadic succession of Being or unified multiplicity, movement of Intellect unraveling number into pure Unities which form the content of the Living Creature or Life which includes and unifies them all. In VI, 7 [38] 16,11-23, potential intellect, looking non-intellectually (ἀνοήτως) at the One, living toward it and turning toward it, as a movement "being filled" and "filling," becomes intellect as the unified totality of all these moments. Again, in intellect's life is the trace of the One, which "shines out" from the One as manifold, indefinite and unbounded (cf. the indefinite duality of V, 1 [10] 6-7), but became bounded in itself without implying any limit in the One; (VI, 7 [38] 17,26; cf. VI, 5 [23] 12,1-11; II, 4 [12] 5,15-18). Here the principle of Multiplicity, which in an earlier treatise (II, 4) he calls "intelligible matter," is named "Life," not the life of the One, but a trace of it.

In *Ennead* VI, 7 [38], "On the Multiplicity of Ideas," he calls the principle of Multiplicity "Life." This entity, which is not hypostatized in his system, is characterized as a certain limitless and multiple trace of Life which, once emitted from the One, looks back upon its source and thereby becomes defined and limited in the form of Intellect, the second hypostasis. Emanating from the One, it takes on limit and definition as the second hypostasis, Intellect, at the point where it contemplatively turns back toward the source from which it was emitted:[14]

> "Intellect therefore had life and had no need of a giver full of variety, and its life was a trace of that Good and not his life. So when its life was looking towards that it was unlimited, but after it had looked there it was limited, though that Good has no limit. For immediately by looking to something which is one the life is limited by it, and has in itself limit and bound

14. *Ennead* VI, 7.17,12-26: Εἶχεν οὖν ζωὴν καὶ οὐκ ἐδεῖτο ποικίλου τοῦ διδόντος, καὶ ἦν ἡ ζωὴ ἴχνος τι ἐκείνου, οὐκ ἐκείνου ζωή. Πρὸς ἐκεῖνο μὲν οὖν βλέπουσα ἀόριστος ἦν, βλέψασα δ' ἐκεῖ ὡρίζετο ἐκείνου οὐκ ἔχοντος. Εὐθὺς γὰρ πρὸς ἕν τι ἰδοῦσα ὁρίζεται τούτῳ καὶ ἴσχει ἐν αὐτῇ ὅρον καὶ πέρας καὶ εἶδος· καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἐν τῷ μορφωθέντι, τὸ δὲ μορφῶσαν ἄμορφον ἦν. Ὁ δὲ ὃς οὐκ ἐξωθεν, οἷον μεγέθει περιτεθείς, ἀλλ' ἦν πάσης ἐκείνης τῆς ζωῆς ὅρος πολλῆς καὶ ἀπείρου οὔσης, ὡς ἂν παρὰ τοιαύτης φύσεως ἐκλαμψάσης... διὰ μὲν τὸ πολὺ τῆς ζωῆς πολλὰ ὁρισθεῖσα, διὰ δὲ αὖ τὸν ἕν. Τί οὖν τὸ "ἓν ὡρίσθη"; Νους· ὁρισθεῖσα γὰρ ζωὴ νοῦς. Τί δὲ τὸ "πολλά"; Νόες πολλοί. To distinguish phases of emanation, Plotinus uses a sequence of verbal aspects, the imperfect representing prefiguration, the present representing activity, and the aorist representing result (e.g., imperfect: εἶχεν, ἐδεῖτο, ἦν, ὡρίζετο; present: βλέπουσα, ὁρίζεται, ἴσχει; aorist: βλέψασα, ἐκλαμψάσης, ὡρίσθη, ὁρισθεῖσα) here and in IV, 8 [6] 1,1-11, etc., rather than the less sophisticated serial sequence of separately named phases found in the anonymous Commentary and in some of the Sethian texts.

> and form; and the form was in that which was shaped, but the shaper was shapeless. But the boundary is not from outside, as if it was surrounded by a largeness, but it was a bounding limit of all that life which is manifold and unbounded, as a life would be which shines out from a nature of this kind ... and it was defined as many because of the multiplicity of its life, but on the other hand as one because of the defining limit. What then does "it was defined as one" mean? Intellect: for life defined and limited is intellect. And what "as many"? Many intellects" (*Ennead* VI, 7.17,6-43 Armstrong).

This feminine principle of multiplicity is never hypostatized at any point; rather than serving as a sort of link between the first two hypostases, it is generally redefined as Life, a member of a triad of attributes (Being, Life, Intelligence) belonging to his second hypostasis, Intellect. Most scholars suspect that Plotinus derived—or at least justified—this triad from his exegesis of Plato, *Sophist* 248C-E, to the effect that true being must also have life and intelligence; for Plotinus, true being is first found in his second hypostasis, Intellect. Plotinus seems intentionally vague about the ontological status of this principle at each phase of the emanative process, perhaps in reaction to certain derivational schemes, such as those of the *Chaldaean Oracles* and certain Gnostic treatises, which may have seemed to him to be too detailed, populating the transcendent world with an excessive number of intermediate entities whose burgeoning multiplicity were in danger of compromising the uniqueness of the supreme One. In his view, all such multiplicity has its start in the Intellect, whose unity keeps it in check, prior to its spilling forth into the lower realms of Soul and Nature.

Although it is not cast as an explicit Being/Existence-Life-Mind or Father-Mother-Child triad, Plotinus' foundational triad of dynamically unfolding principles (the One, an undefined Life, and Intellect as determinate Being) is clearly parallel to the Existence-Life-Intellection triad of the final fragment of the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary, and, as I hope to show, to the Triple Powered One of the Platonizing Sethian triads. Plotinus distinguishes this dyadic precursor of intellect from both the life of the One and the life of Intellect, which latter accrues to it in the course of its reversion to the One. Since Intellect acquires its formal being by a process that necessitates reversion upon some object of its vision, the life presupposed by that reversion is as much the cause of Intellect as its effect: hence the equation of the life residing in intellect with the indeterminate potency that generates it. This is the derivational

scheme that becomes canonical in the later Neoplatonic accounts of the derivation of the manifold world from the supreme One by means of a double movement: the procession or exteriorization (πρόοδος or προβολή) of a product potentially existing in its source and its self-definition as a separately existing entity by subsequent reflection or contemplative reversion (ἐπιστροφή) upon its source.[15]

In view of the likely chronological priority of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* to most of the *Enneads*, and in particular to *Ennead* II, 9 [33] which seems to presuppose these Sethian texts, they ought to be included in the sources that may have influenced the derivational scheme by which Plotinus accounted for the generation of Intellect from the One. One must also include their own still earlier Middle Platonic sources, such as the negative-theological source shared in common by *Allogenes* (XI 62,28-63,25) and the *Apocryphon of John* (II 3,18-33) and the source shared in common by *Zostrianos* (VIII 64,13-66,11; 66,14b-68,13; 74,17-75,21) and Victorinus' *Adversus Arium* (I.49,9-40; 50,1-21), which feature the Existence-Life-Blessedness triad.

The relatively simple metaphysical scheme of Plotinus was destined to undergo significant elaboration, perhaps beginning with his senior disciple Amelius, but particularly with Iamblichus (ca. 245-325), who began the major system of scholastic elaboration by means of the seemingly endless triadic structures that became the hallmark of later Neoplatonism. As previously illustrated, Plotinus had already sensed the tension between a totally transcendent One that can only be described negatively, and a One that is in some way the origin of all things. Thus a metaphysics of four ontological levels or hypostases is constructed: the One, Intellect, Soul, and finally the realm of Nature. Plotinus also occasionally exhibits a tendency toward elaboration at lower levels of being as well, for example, to elevate the Logos into something like a further hypostasis between Soul and Nature, and to distinguish a lower from a higher Soul in which Nature is identified with the lower Soul. But in general, perhaps as a result of discussion with his Gnostic interlocutors as well as other members of his circle, Plotinus resists any multiplication of hypostatic entities beyond the first three.

With regard to the basic Neoplatonic concern with how to derive multiplicity from an original simple unity, Plotinus had already propounded

15. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 312-337.

the theory of an undiminished giving on the part of the One conceived as an inexhaustible spring that creates without being affected in any way by its product. The resulting universe is a continuous plenum in which no gap can be tolerated. The later Neoplatonists merely attempt to implement this rule, not so much by the creation of new hypostases beyond an original unity preceding the intellectual and psychic realms, but rather by a multiplication of moments or phases within each of the major hypostases, thus providing mutual linkages between any conceptual gaps conceived as "means" between extremes. Thus a higher reality and the one immediately below it in the chain of being could be related together by the sequence of emanative phases permanence, procession, and reversion (μονή, πρόοδος, ἐπιστροφή) undergone by any product emanating from a source, or could be linked by such relational categories as unparticipated, participated, and in-participation (especially Iamblichus) or the whole-before-the-parts, the whole-of-parts, and the whole existing in-the-parts (especially Theodore of Asine).

II. PORPHYRY

Unlike the *Enneads* of Plotinus, no complete metaphysical work survives from the hand of the three post-Plotinian Neoplatonists on whose systems I have chosen to comment. Porphyry was principally a commentator and a scholastic, but, as his edition of the *Enneads* indicates, he was a popularizer of Plotinus' thought, and so among Neoplatonists it is often his philosophical influence that predominated in the later Latin West among pagans and Christians alike. The most interesting treatment of Porphyry's metaphysics for our purposes is that of P. Hadot, in his article "La métaphysique de Porphyre" and in his two volume work *Porphyre et Victorinus*.[16] Hadot bases much of his interpretation of

16. P. HADOT, "La métaphysique de Porphyre," in *Porphyre* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique XII; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1966), 127-157; "Discussion," 158-163, and *IDEM*, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (2 vols.; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968). See also A. SMITH, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974) and *IDEM*, "Porphyrian Studies since 1913" in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. W. Haase and H. Temporini (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1987), II 36.2, 717-73. Also important is L. BRISSON *et al.*, *Porphyre: La Vie de Plotin*. Vol. I. Travaux préliminaires et index complet. Histoire des doctrines de l'Antiquité classique 6. Paris: J. Vrin, 1982. Vol. II. Études d'introduction, texte grec et traduction française, commentaire, notes complémentaires, bibliographie (Paris: J. Vrin, 1992).

Porphyry on his brilliant but unproved demonstration that Porphyry was the author of the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary discussed in the Chapter 9, as well as upon certain doctrines found in Marius Victorinus' anti-Arian theological treatises, on the basis of W. Theiler's working hypothesis that every non-Plotinian Neoplatonic doctrine found in both Augustine and a later Neoplatonist (in this case Victorinus) must derive from Porphyry.[17]

In addition to the philosophy of Plotinus, Porphyry occupied himself considerably with the interpretation of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, upon which he wrote a commentary. Thus in his *Sententiae* Porphyry has little to say about the One that does not generally coincide with Plotinus' views. On the other hand, he was much criticized by later Neoplatonists for his tendency to "telescope" the Plotinian hypostases, for example by identifying Plotinus' One with the first term (Father or Existence?) of the Chaldaean intelligible triad, thus destroying the One's transcendence:

> "Should one say with Porphyry (in his commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles*) that the Father of the intelligible triad is the unique principle of everything? ... But how can the non-coordinated and absolutely ineffable cause of everything be co-enumerated with the intelligibles and be called the Father of the first triad, since the triad is still the summit of determinate beings, but that ineffable cause transcends everything?" (Damascius, *Dub. et Sol.* I.86,8-16 Ruelle [*De Principiis* II.1,11-2,4 Westerink-Combès]).

Clearly, Porphyry had attempted to establish some kind of continuity between the divine Intellect and the supreme One that seemed to undermine Plotinus' attempt to sharply distinguish between them. Apparently he wanted to demonstrate that the Intellect—which for Plotinus is completely discontinuous with the transcendent One—is paradoxically at the same time both discontinuous and continuous with the One. In *Sententiae* 44 Porphyry argues that while the successive and discursive activity of soul associates it with movement and time, Intellect, which simultaneously intelligizes both itself and all things, is associated with eternity, thinking in and according to unity. In the *Historia philosophiae* (frg. 18), he says that "God is the first and only one, remaining always

17. *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft, Geistwissenschaftliche Kl., X, 1; Halle (Saale): M. Niemeyer, 1933), 1-74.

by himself although all things are generated by him, since by virtue of his proper existence he cannot be co-enumerated or coordinated in value with them." From the one god, the divine "Intellect has pre-eternally originated and proceeded ... as self-generated and self-father" (αὐτοπάτωρ, a term found also in *Eugnostos the Blessed!*) as an eternal and timeless product, "since as yet there was no time." That is, the Intellect pre-eternally pre-exists in the one god, but once manifested, what was pre-eternal becomes definitely eternal. Moreover, in *Sententiae* 25-26, Porphyry also states the epistemological counterpart of the preexistence of the Intellect in the One when he says that the One is to be apprehended by a "non-intelligence superior to intelligence," a notion very similar to that found in both the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary and in the Sethian treatise *Allogenes*, and which may have been based on fragment 1 of the *Chaldaean Oracles* according to which "there is a certain Intelligible (the supreme Father) that you must perceive by the flower of the mind," toward which "you should extend an empty mind" in order to comprehend it, "since it exists outside of Intellect." Clearly there is a parallel between the self-generation of Intellect from the One and human contemplation of the One.

Hadot summarizes:[18] "two states of intellect are distinguished: pre-existent and pre-eternal Intellect on the one hand, and on the other, self-manifested Intelligence, self-generated and eternal," self-engendered from its prefigurative existence in the One. Hadot observes that this doctrine is very close to that found in the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary discussed in the previous chapter, and uses this as an argument that the commentary too must have been written by Porphyry. Intellect thus prefiguratively pre-exists in the One, which Porphyry characterizes as "containing everything non-intellectually and hyper-essentially" (*Sententiae* 10).

Moreover, the One contains within itself not only the prefigurative Intellect, but also its own mode of Life (*Sententiae* 12). Building on the *Oracles*' doctrine of Hecate as "the center between the two fathers," it seems that Porphyry identified her with the Plotinian principle of intelligible Life as a mediating hypostasis between the Plotinian One and Intellect. Although this later left Augustine (*De civitate Dei God* X.23) puzzled about this new intermediary between the first two hypostases,

18. "La métaphysique de Porphyre," 147.

Hadot has observed that this scheme accords perfectly with that of fragment XIV of the *Parmenides* commentary discussed in the previous chapter whose authorship he ascribes to Porphyry. What is more, the fact that Damascius identifies the first term of the *Oracles*' Father-Power-Intellect triad with Existence (ὕπαρξις) suggests to Hadot the strong possibility that the word ὕπαρξις was already a substitute for πατήρ in the *Oracles*.[19] All this implies that Porphyry placed at the summit of his theological metaphysics an ennead consitiuted by three triads, each designated by the three terms existence, life, and intelligence (ὕπαρξις – δύναμις – νοῦς), each forming (and predominating in) successive triads. In the first triad, equated with the One, ὕπαρξις predominates, while δύναμις and νοῦς are implicit or virtual. In the second triad which represents the moment of unlimited movement away from the One, δύναμις predominates and in the third triad there is the return and definition of νοῦς as such:

Father/Existence	*Existence*	Life = δύναμις	Intellect
Life	Existence	*Life*	Intellect
Intellect	Existence	Life	*Intellect*

Porphyry's treatment of lower levels of reality, in particular the generation of matter, is also linked with his understanding of how reality is generated from the One. For Plotinus, matter is generated by the primal Otherness which comes from the One and is defined as intelligible and intelligent by turning back to the One. Lower matter is the reflection of intelligible matter, but in its own nature is pure privation, non-being, and evil (cf. *Ennead* II, 4, 1-5; 15-16). In the *Sententiae*, matter is an active

19. HADOT, *Porphyre et Victorinus* I, 267 n. 7; "La métaphysique de Porphyre," 140. Hadot does not discuss the possible role of *Chaldaean Oracles* frg. 4 des Places ἡ μὲν γὰρ δύναμις σὺν ἐκείνῳ [*scil.* τῷ πατρί] νοῦς δὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνου, which H. LEWY relates to *Anon. Taur. in Parmenidem* IX 1-2 Hadot 2.90 (*Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* [Recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire XIII; Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1956; new edition, ed. M. Tardieu; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1978], p. 79, n. 47). While Lewy thinks this νοῦς is an emanation of the πατρικὸς νοῦς of the Chaldaeans, it is also possible that it is the πατρικὸς νοῦς itself. This verse may have formed, along with the *Apocryphon of John* and Neopythagorean speculation, the basis on which *Allogenes* or perhaps Porphyry developed the Being or Existence-Life or Dynamis-Mind triad.

principle of evil and absolute non-being,[20] but in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* (*apud* Proclus, *In Tim.* I.300,1-3 Diehl), Porphyry seems to adopt a different position according to which matter is generated from the One. Porphyry distinguishes the "Father" and the "Demiurge": the Father generates the "whole" from himself and the Demiurge receives matter from the Father. Matter, therefore, is a product of the highest deity which is then handed on to successive levels of being, but similar views are also found in Plotinus.

III. IAMBLICHUS

Even less remains of the work of Iamblichus than that of Porphyry—only the *De Mysteriis*, his *Life of Pythagoras*, two arithmetical treatises, and his *Protrepticus*, making it necessary for his metaphysics to be reconstructed mainly from these and from citations of his work found in Proclus and later Neoplatonists and anthologists like Stobaeus. Compared with Porphyry—whose coordination of the One with the highest moment of Intellect demanded that his successors somehow reinstate the absolute transcendence of the supreme principle—Iamblichus completely revamped the old four-level Plotinian metaphysics.[21]

The evidence for Iamblichus' conception of the realm of the One comes from Damascius (*De principiis* I, Chapters 43, 50, and 51; cf. Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* VIII.2). He posited a "completely ineffable" One (παντελῶς ἄρρητον),[22] followed by "the simply One" (ὁ ἁπλῶς ἕν), followed by the indefinite Dyad of the Limit and the Unlimited (πέρας, τὸ ἄπειρον), and finally "The One Existent" (τὸ ἓν ὄν). There is thus a triad of Ones along with a principle of multiplicity.[23]

20. In *Sententiae* 30,14 Mommert reads κακὸν ἡ ὕλη, but Lamberz καλόν; cf. also 20,2-16.

21. According to J. FINAMORE, "Iamblichus, the Sethians, and *Marsanes*," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 225-257; the following sketch of Iamblichus' metaphysics is due to him.

22. It is completely transcendent: it "is not therefore participated (μετέχεται), nor does anything have a share (μεταδίδωσι) of it" (Damascius, *De principiis* I.25,21-22).

23. "After this we must examine whether there are two first principles before the first intelligible triad, the completely ineffable and the one unconnected with the triad (ἡ ἀσυντάκτος πρὸς τὴν τριάδα), as the great Iamblichus says in book 28 of his most perfect *Chaldaean Theology*" (Damascius, *De principiis* II.1,4-8).

Next, Iamblichus added another new ontological level, the intellectual realm, between Plotinus' intelligible and psychic realms and expanded each of them.[24] While Porphyry had "telescoped" the Plotinian hypostases by pointing out their prefigurative existence in their source, Iamblichus achieves a similar result by a method of triadization most clearly evident in his treatment of the realm of Intellect: the highest member of each realm is the unparticipated essence of that realm (ἀμέθεκτος), the next lower member is that essence capable of being participated in by a lower entity (μετεχόμενος), and the lowest member is that essence existing in lower entities (κατὰ μέθεξιν). Also, to further separate (yet connect) the different realms, the lowest member of one realm was also considered the highest member of the next realm, but the entity *qua* member of the higher realm was somehow also differentiated from it *qua* member of the lower.

The Intelligible Realm was presided over by "the One Existent" seen as the first member of the triad Being-Life-Mind (ὄν-ζωή-νοῦς). This is Iamblichus' interpretation of *Sophist* 248E-249A (i.e., there cannot be mind without being and life; cited above, p. 407), whereby Being is unparticipated Existence, Life is participated Existence, and Intellect is the result of participation in Existence. The Demiurge exists at the level of Intellect along with the Forms themselves.[25]

The intellectual realm also consists of three moments: the unparticipated Intellect, the participated Intellect, and the Intellect-in-participation. This last member is also the highest member of the next realm, viz. the hypercosmic Soul (unparticipated Soul) in the psychic realm. This soul in turn divides into the cosmic Soul (participated Soul) and individual souls (souls-in-participation). Beneath these is the realm of Nature.

24. According to J. M. DILLON, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (Philosophia antiqua 23; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 417-419, Proclus (*in Tim.* I.308.18-23) alludes to a work, "Concerning the Speech of Zeus in the Timaeus," in which Iamblichus adds an "Intelligible and Intellectual" realm between the Intelligible realm and the Intellectual realm; this is a later development, dependent on Iamblichus' study of the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

25. These would be differentiated forms that come into existence throughout the realm, existing in an undifferentiated manner as "monads of the forms" in being; cf. DILLON, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta* (Philosophia antiqua 23. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), frg. 4, p. 103.

Notice that Iamblichus stresses the individual soul's inferiority to Intellect by its removal to a lower hypostasis.

Iamblichus' system can therefore be represented in tabular form as follows:

First Principles	**The Absolutely Ineffable**	
(Monad)	**The Simply One** (uncoordinated)	
(Dyad)	**Limit** **Unlimited**	
The Noetic Triad (encompassed by Demiurge)	The unparticipated **One-Being** (*Being*) *mikton, patrikos nous*	
	Participated Being (*Life*)	
	Being-in-participation (*Mind*) = Unparticipated Intelligible Mind	(Same)
	Participated **Intelligible Mind** (differentiated Forms)	(Other)
	Intelligible Mind-in-participation = Unparticipated Intellectual Mind	
	Participated **Intellectual Mind**	
Psychic	Intellectual Mind-in-participation = Unparticipated **Hypercosmic Soul**	(Same)
	Participated **Encosmic Soul** (of the All)	(Other)
	Partial **Souls-in-participation**	
Nature	All-perfect souls	
	Divine souls	
	Daemonic souls	
	Heroic souls	
	Human-animal souls	
	bodies / matter	

IV. Theodore of Asine

Of all the post-Plotinian Neoplatonists, Theodore of Asine merits extended treatment here if for no other reasons than the rather close structural resemblance of his metaphysical system to that underlying *Marsanes*, and the extraordinary resemblance between *Marsanes*' alphabetic and numerological treatment of the various configurations of the soul and the incredibly prolix alphabetic and numerological speculation that Theodore employs in his discussion of the nature of the soul. Eunapius says Theodore was a student of both Porphyry and Iamblichus (Damascius, *Vita Isidori* sect. 166 p. 230 Zintzen), although his ideas often rivaled those of Iamblichus. He was furthermore much attracted to the doctrines of Numenius and especially Amelius, although he was not a student of theirs (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* II.274,11).[26]

Like Iamblichus, Theodore superimposed a supreme fifth ontological level upon the four-level metaphysics of Plotinus. In his commentary on the *Timaeus* (II.274,10-277,26), Proclus gives the following summary of Theodore's metaphysical system, with particular emphasis on his interpretation of the *psychogonia* of Plato's *Timaeus*, part of which was derived from Theodore's own commentary on the *Timaeus*, and the remainder perhaps derived from Theodore's essay *Peri onomatôn* (cf. Proclus, *Theologia Platonica* IV.68,15-18). It will be observed that his numerological treatment of the soul in terms of the arithmetic, geometric, and harmonic ratios into which the Demiurge divided the psychic ingredients of Being, Same and Different is based on the numerical value (expressed in terms of units [monads], tens [decads], and hundreds [hecatontads]) and the numerical properties and geometrical shapes of each letter of the word for soul (ψ, υ, χ, η) taken in turn. The soul is clearly the link between the divine intellect and the sensible cosmos. On the one hand, its indivisible wholeness (i.e., soul *qua* Being?) is an image of the first mind (intelligible triad), and, of the two circles into which it is split, the circle of the Same is an image of the second mind (the "intellectual depth"), and the circle of the Different is an image of the third mind (the "demiurgical depth"). On the other hand, the various divisions of the soul give rise to the stars, planets, and the signs of the Zodiac. Thus there is here a certain resemblance—if not in precise detail, at least in spirit—to *Marsanes*' treatment of the configurations of the soul (to be discussed in Chapter 14), except that Theodore restricts himself to the numerical and geometrical properties of the letters spelling the word "Psyche," while *Marsanes* treats the shapes of soul and various nomenclatures in terms of the properties of the first twelve numbers and in terms of all the letters of the alphabet according to strictly grammatical categories.

> Theodore of Asine, a philosopher informed by the discourses of Numenius, has fashioned a novel version of (Plato's) discourses on the psychogony,

26. See the collection of fragments and testimonia on Theodore in W. Deuse, *Theodoros von Asine; Sammlung der Testimonien und Kommentar* (Palingenesia 6; Wiesbaden, F. Steiner, 1973); see also H. D. Saffrey, "Le « philosophe de Rhodes » est-il Théodore d'Asinée?," in *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière*, ed. E. Lucchesi and H. D. Saffrey (Geneva: P. Cramer, 1984), 65-76.

producing doctrines on letters and characters and numbers. So that we might have his opinions concisely described, attend, and we will make a point-by-point synopsis concerning each thing he says.

A. Rightly then he celebrates the first One as the ineffable and unutterable source of all and cause of goodness.

B. After this One, transcendent above all, comes a triad defining the intelligible level (νοητὸν πλάτος), which he calls the One (*hen*), who derives from 1) the breathing that somehow pertains to the *spiritus lenis* [of the supreme One's] ineffability (ἄρρητον), imitated by the *spiritus asper* of "the one" (ἕν), 2) from just the arch of the letter ε alone without the following consonant ν, and 3) lastly the letter ν.

C. After this he defines another triad, a) the Intellectual Depth, and another one, b) the Demiurgical Depth; the first one (a) is εἶναι before being (τὸ ὄν), νοεῖν before intellect (νοῦς), ζῆν before life (ζωή).

D. The demiurgical triad (b) is after these, first having being, second intellect, and third, the source (πηγή) of souls.

E. And from this triad there is another triad, the absolute soul (αὐτοψυχή), the universal (καθόλου) soul, and the all-soul (τοῦ πάντος), concerning whose division we previously spoke (II 215,30-218,20), each of which proceeded from the entire [275] demiurgic triad, but especially the one from being, the one from the mind, and the one from the originary (πηγαῖα) soul (i.e., from life).

It is concerning this third soul, soul of the all, that according to him (Theodore) Plato spoke, but even more concerning the absolute (ἁπλῶς) soul deriving from the originary (πηγαῖα) soul (the demiurgical depth κατὰ ζῆν), and concerning the universal soul together with the all-soul, and about the source itself.

[Perhaps the following is from Theodore's *Peri onomatôn* rather than from his *Timaeus* commentary:] For all things are in all things, if sometimes in one way and sometimes in another, even 1) in the originary (πηγαῖα) soul prior to the triad taken as unity (i.e., the demiurgical depth κατὰ ζῆν), 2a) in the absolute soul taken as the whole before the parts, and 2b) in the universal (soul) absolutely taken as the whole out of parts, and 2c) in the third soul taken as the (whole) in parts, as if Plato were arranging all these things and, assigning all the relations (λόγοι) to all the souls, was neglecting their difference.

And to begin with, it seems one ought to say why this soul is composed of three means (geometric, arithmetic, harmonic). And moreover he also says that the proportion (λόγος) of the soul as a whole is geometrical, having originated from the first God taken according to being and from the second taken according to intellect. For these are two (separate) essences, the undivided and the divided. And to the geometric ratio are reckoned both the arithmetic ratio bearing the image of the first (undivided) essence and the harmonic ratio of the second (divided essence). For the one is monadic, being unextended, while the other is extended, but harmonically.

Next he says that the soul (ψ υ χ η = 700, 400, 600, 8) is exhibited as a tetrad from the tetrad of elements, and that also the entire number would be a certain geometric number. Lest one suppose this number to be lifeless, one will find the act of living (τὸ ζῆν) in the extreme letters (ψ, η), taking the first heptad (ζ = 7) instead of the third (ψ = 700) [i.e., ζ + η = ζῆ, "it lives"].

Moreover, if one posits the base (πυθμήν, expressed in powers of ten) terms (ζ = 7, ο = 70) of the first letter (ζ) next to this letter (ψ), one will see that the soul is an intellectual life, as it were ζ ο ψ (= 7, 70, 700); the mean is the circle (ο), being intellectual, since intellect is the cause of the soul. And the smallest base term (Z = 7) shows that the soul is a certain geometric intellect because of the junction of the parallel lines with the diagonal straight line, an intellect that remains above and advances to the opposite line and manifests simultaneously a straight (the duple series 1 2 4 8) and an oblique (the triple series 1 3 9 27) form of life. |[276] The greatest base (ψ = 700) is an element of a sphere; at any rate, the lines by being bent concave clearly make the sphere.

Beyond this, the bases of the succeeding letter, δ μ υ (= 4, 40, 400) again being three and tetradic and therefore generating twelve, complete the twelve spheres of the all [cf. *Marsanes* X 39,13-17!]. The greatest of the bases (ϒ) shows that the essence of the soul aspires toward two things and extends toward two things (πράγματα)—therefore some call this letter philosophical (the Pythagorean ϒ?)—but that the soul itself is drawn downwards from both.

Thus at any rate, we also find this denomination of the ϒ also among certain sages, and the ϒ (= 400) is midway between the two spheres of the ψ and the χ, the latter being warmer on account of the spirit (i.e., as aspirated) as well as more vivifying, while the former (ψ as a semivowel or sibilant) has these (qualities) to a lesser degree. Again the soul is a mean of two intellects, the first (ψ = 700) anterior and the last (χ = 600) posterior, while the middle character (υ = 400) shows its intimacy and relationship to each one. However, Plato assigned χ to the soul—even though the letter ψ is also a sphere—so that the equilibrium of the soul's motion might be evident—since all the straight lines are equal in the χ—and thus might advertise the self-motion of the soul. If the demiurge creates the soul by his sole existence (εἶναι), it is clear that he too is analogous with the χ; for this (viz. εἶναι, i.e., the intellectual depth) is the foremost mind. Through these things he says that the soul proceeds and creates itself as a certain sub-

stance intermediate between two minds (the Intellectual and Demiurgical depths). Just so are these things to be understood.

And through the final letter, the η (= 8), one sees the soul's procession (πρόοδος) to the cube. And if on account of the otherness of life it is a dyad (2 × 4), and if, on account of the tripartite nature of its essence (2^3) it is a triad, straightway it has the sesquialtern (ἡμιόλιος, 3/2) ratio. When it enters into itself and, because of this entrance (cf. πρόοδος), multiplies the dyad by the triad, it generates the hexad (2 × 3), and when it joins |[277] the dyad with the undivided and tripartite, it gives rise to the harmony consisting the double ratio. When it reverts to itself (cf. ἐπιστροφή) as the triad, it produces the ennead (3^2), and when, as the dyad, it enters itself dyadically (2 × 2 × 2), it produces the octad, and by means of both (octad and ennead) it produces the sesquioctave (ἐπόγδοος, 9/8) ratio.

And the generation (of the soul) by lines makes clear both its undividedness and its absolute identity throughout; for each part of a line is a line; and all the ratios are everywhere present; and the splitting in two (into the circles of the Same and Different) shows that the form of the soul is dyadic. Of the two totalities, the indivisible totality is the image of the first intellect (the intelligible triad), while that of the two totalities that is undivided—which he calls the circle of the same—is the image of the second intellect (the intellectual depth), and the totality that is split into six is an image of the third intellect (the demiurgical depth) that is counted last.

And the octad (η) is derived from the dyad of the soul; and the heptad (ζ) is manifested among units (monads) as that which symbolizes the first form of life (ζωή), and among decads as the intellectual aspect on account of the circle (ο = 70), and finally among the hundreds (ψ = 700) it (the heptad) is manifested as the peculiar property of the soul. And the soul's unswerving affinity (cf. μονή) with generation gives rise to the fixed (stars), and its procession (ἔξοδος, cf. πρόοδος) and boundlessness gives rise to the wandering (planets), and its reversion (ἐπιστροφή) after the procession gives rise to the inerrantly wandering life. And since the shape of the soul is as a χ, the form is dyadic (for the schism is into two), and the dyad multiplied by the hexad—the first numerical base of the χ (600)—makes the dodecad, one may assume from this the twelve primary ruling souls (i.e., the Zodiac). Offering here only a sample of many things, Theodore thus philosophizes, basing his interpretations on letters and pronunciations. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* II.274,10-277,28)

Theodore thus posits two ones, a first One—ineffable and apparently uncoordinated with anything below it—and a second, intelligible, One (ἕν) who is somehow the aspirated breath of the inaspirate ineffability of the first and who defines an intelligible triad represented by the Greek letters HEN, probably conceived as a primal monad, dyad, and triad.

consisting of itself as 1) an unpronounceable aspiration (H) represented in characters by a dimensionless point, 2) a pronounceable vowel (E), whose written representation is a one-dimensional dyadic curved line (ἀψίς, the "arch" of the ε) symbolizing its own "contact" or reversion upon itself (cf. *Parmenides* 148E-149D) and 3) thanks to the preceding vowel, a pronounceable consonant (N) that symbolizes its intelligibility (νοητόν) by means of the intersecting lines of the ν that define a triadic surface. One now has point, line, and plane, to which one need only add depth for a three dimensional realm. It is interesting to note that, although *Marsanes*' second ontological level is occupied by the "Invisible Spirit," *Marsanes* apparently maintains that this spirit "does not have breath" (X 15,1-4; 15,29-16,2). Indeed Victorinus maintains the same position concerning the supreme One in *Adversus Arium* I.50,5-8: "(the One is) Spirit beyond Spirit, for he does not breathe, but rather it is the Spirit in that which is his being, Spirit breathing towards itself so that it is Spirit, since the Spirit is not separate from itself."

Below this second One, there are two "depths," one, the Intellectual Depth characterized by a purely infinitival triad of existing, thinking and living, and the other, the Demiurgical Depth, characterized as a purely determinate triad composed of being, mind, and life. In third place, the third member of the Demiurgical Depth, in its capacity as the prefigurative (πηγαῖα) soul, gives rise to the psychic triad of absolute soul, universal soul, and the soul of the all. Leaving aside his Ineffable One, Theodore thus divides the Plotinian hypostatic Intellect into three triads (νοητή, νοερά, δημιουργική), and from the ὄν, νοῦς, and ζωή (= πηγαῖα ψυχή) of the demiurgic triad derives the three souls, αὐτοψυχή, καθόλου ψυχή, and ψυχή τοῦ πάντος, as three kinds of totalities that contain everything as first, a whole before-the-parts, second, as a whole resulting-from-the-parts, and third, as a whole included-in-the-parts.

Furthermore, in a previous comment, Proclus had compared Theodore's doctrine of the Demiurgical Depth of Being, Mind, and Life with Iamblichus' doctrine of the entire intelligible cosmos, which considered the collective of its three members—the One Being, the intelligible (i.e., contemplated) intellect, and the intellectual (i.e., contemplating) intellect—to be coextensive with the single figure of the Demiurge himself.[27]

27. Proclus, *In Tim.* I.307,19-25: "At any rate, he (Iamblichus) says in his *Commentaries*: 'Real being and the beginning of created things and the intelligible paradigms of the cosmos—which we call the intelligible cosmos—and such causes

In this, Proclus claims that Theodore is actually following Plotinus' disciple Amelius, who according to Proclus[28] claimed that there were three demiurges or intellects in a mutual union, or perhaps a triple demiurge consisting of three intellects, a first one (variously described as "he who is," the first "King" of Plato's *Second Letter* 312E, or "Phanes," or the "one who plans" or "intends"), a second one (variously described as "the one who possessed" [the intelligible prior to him], or the second "King," or "Ouranos," or "the one who reasons" [λογιζόμενος] by intellection, or the one who makes solely "by command"), and a third (as "the one who sees," or the third "King," or "Kronos," or the "one who operates on" [παραλαβῶν] the world "by the work of his hand").

Apparently, however, Theodore's view of the demiurge differs from that of Amelius and Iamblichus by considering it to be coextensive, not with the entire intelligible triad (comprising the second "One," the "Intellectual Depth," and the "Demiurgical Depth"), but only with the third member, the Demiurgical Depth, which itself comprises essential mind, the intellectual essence, and the source of souls. It indeed appears that none of these thinkers really posited three demiurges, but rather a single demiurge comprising three functions. Theodore's difference from the other two thinkers seems to be that he placed his demiurge below an intelligible realm above him, as if to emphasize that the Demiurge must consult a paradigm that exists above him (as Plato suggests in the *Timaeus*, even though he also calls the Demiurge "Intellect"); thus it rather appears that Theodore thinks in terms of three intellects rather than three demiurges:

> After Iamblichus, Theodore, following Amelius, says that there are three demiurges, and he ranks them, not immediately after the One, but below (ἐπίταδε) the intelligible and intellectual gods, calling the one the essential mind (οὐσιώδη νοῦς), the next the intellectual essence (νόερα οὐσία) and [the third] the source of souls (πηγή ψυχῶν); the first one is indivisible, the second is divisible into wholes; and the third effects division into individuals.
>
> So again the same things ought to be said about this that are also said to the noble Amelius: that if we (Proclus) acknowledge that there are these three gods or ones analogous to these, we do not admit three demiurges, but profess that the [first is] the intelligible object of the demiurge, the second, his generative power, and third the true demiurgic mind. And it is useful to establish whether the source of souls is to be ranked third, for generative power pertains to the middle deity, as he himself says somewhere, and whether he is to be denominated partially as "originary soul" (πηγαῖα ψυχή) but not more universally as "source of life." For the source of souls is only one of the sources in it (the source of life), since, moreover, living is not merely in souls nor in animated things, but there is a also a life of gods and intellects before the life of souls, which he says proceeded from the source of life, other channels being distributed according to other forms of life. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* I.309,14-310,2)

we posit as pre-existing all things in nature, all these the Demiurge God we now seek gathers into one and contains in himself."

28. See the citations from Amelius (Proclus, *In Tim.* I.306,1-14; I.361,26-362,4; I.398,16-26) in Chapter 9, n. 76.

Rather than the notion of three demiurges, it seems as if the real object of Proclus' criticism is the order of Theodore's "non-canonical" arrangement of the Demiurges' three faculties of Being, Mind, and Life.

Among the Neoplatonists from Iamblichus onward, the sequence Being, Life, and Mind as found in Plotinus' earlier treatises became the canonical form of this triad, even though the non-canonical sequence Being-Mind-Life was often used by Plotinus in and after his antignostic *Großschrift*.[29] As the discussion of the Triple Powered One in Chapter 12 will show, a similar variability in the ordering of the Existence-Vitality-Mentality (or Existence-Vitality-Blessedness) terms that denominate the three powers of the Triple Powered One is found in the Platonizing Sethian treatises. For the most part, they observe the canonical order, perhaps because—with the exception of *Marsanes*, whose nomenclature for the triad is completely different—these treatises have no particular interest in a cosmic soul whose relationship to the intellectual realm of the Barbelo Aeon needs to be clarified. In general, in the

29. For Plotinus generally, one might especially expect the order Being-Mind-Life, mainly because the last term naturally points downward to the fundamental Life principle of his system, the immediately subjacent hypostasis of Soul e.g., *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6,14-19 and III, 6 [26] 6,21-28. In the treatise *On Numbers* that directly follows the *Großschrift*, Plotinus tends to change the order of the Being-Life-Mind triad that dominates the structure of the divine Intellect in the earlier treatises to the Being-Mind-Life order earlier implicit in Numenius and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, apparently on the grounds that the truly living being, "that which has life," represents a more diverse multiplicity than do being and mind, e.g., VI, 6 [34] 8,17-22: "First, then, we take Being as first in order; then Mind, then that which has Life, for this appears already to "contain all things" (*Timaeus* 31A4), and Mind, as the act of Being, is second. Thus it is clear that numbers cannot depend upon that which has Life, since unity and duality existed before that, nor would it depend on mind, as before that was being, which is both one and many."

earlier Sethian treatises it is Sophia who plays the role of the cosmic soul, but in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, it is Autogenes, functioning as a demiurgic intellect, that plays the role of the cosmic soul, and he also presides over the realm of disembodied souls in the Self-generated Aeons. On the other hand, Theodore—with his doctrine of two triadic intellectual principles (structured as Existing-Thinking-Living and Being-Mind-Life respectively) each of whose three modalities is mirrored by no less than three distinct levels of cosmic soul (absolute, universal, and all-soul)—is manifestly preoccupied with the origin and nature of the cosmic soul.

For the later Neoplatonists generally, it became a principle that ontological priority must correspond to logical priority, since more universal concepts were regarded as causes of more effects. Thus the canonical order Being-Life-Mind is justified by the principle that Being must be prior to Life and Life to Mind, since not all that exists is alive and all that is alive does not exercise thought (Proclus, *Elementa Theologica* 101, *Theologia Platonica* III.126,1-11). On the other hand, the non-canonical order Being-Mind-Life used by Theodore and sometimes by Plotinus might well have been justified on the basis of *Timaeus* 39E: "Nous beholds the ideas resident in the truly living being; such and so many as exist therein he purposed that the universe should contain," and *Sophist* 248E-249A: "Are we really to be so easily persuaded that change, life, soul and intelligence have no place in the perfectly real, that is has neither life nor intelligence, but stands aloof devoid of intelligence?" Here, the emphasis falls on the connection between the ideal paradigm and the immediately subjacent cosmic soul, the fundamental Life principle of Platonic metaphysics, which the non-canonical version of the triad expresses in the sequence of its last two terms (Mind and Life). By way of contrast, the "canonical" order Being-Life-Mind seems to have more to do with an interpretation of the *Parmenides*, in particular the relation between hypothesis I on the absolute One (137C-142A) and hypothesis II on the One-Being (143E-145A; identified by Middle Platonists such as the anonymous *Parmenides* commentator, with Intellect); here, the concern is not with the origins of the cosmic soul, the principle of life, but with the derivation of determinate being (the One-Being as Intellect and the Forms) from its suprajacent indeterminate and unitary source (the absolute One). All of this suggests that the order Being-Mind-Life, deriving from the influence of the *Timaeus* and *Sophist* passages, is used mainly contexts where the structure of Intellect and its relation to Soul is of uppermost concern, while the order Being-Life-Mind is used mainly in derivational contexts where the relation of Intellect or determinate being to its indeterminate, unitary source is of uppermost concern. When the initial moment of Intellect as it emerges from the One is characterized in terms of indefiniteness, it is Plato's "theological" treatise *Parmenides* rather than his "physical" treatise *Timaeus* that is in view. But when one deals with the self-determination of that indeterminate being (as intellect), it is the *Sophist* passage that provides a suggestive answer: how can being become? What is the being of becoming? Answer: Life is the being (εἶναι) of the becoming of being (ὄν).

Theodore's doctrine of the soul is as complex as his doctrine of the intellect. Just as the intellectual realm is triadic, so also is that of the soul. Proclus (*In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* II 215,30-218,20) summarizes it as follows:

> After this explanation (of Porphyry and Iamblichus), which is so admirable, the philosopher Theodore, proceeding in a certain path peculiar to himself, says that after the one principle of all things, there are three souls, one that is soul-in-itself (τὴν αὐτό) and belonging to the originary (πηγαῖαν) source, another soul taken universally (καθόλου), and another the soul of this universe.
>
> He also says that the first of these is indivisible, the second divisible by wholes, and that the third possesses divisions of every kind. Since there are three souls, that which is absolute and originary is the soul originating between the indivisible (ἀμέριστος) and divisible (μεριστός) essence, of which the former is universal intellect (καθόλος νοῦς), and the latter the intellect that is divisible into individuals. Hence the first (absolute) soul is the mean between these, as subsisting from both (intellects) that are prior to it, having become a complete unity composed of three intermediate kinds.
>
> But the second, which is universal soul, is divided into parts and harmonized. From the first soul, abiding wholly in itself, a division is produced, which is a progression from the first soul that is a whole prior to parts into the soul that consists of parts.
>
> And the third soul is that which is fashioned through straight lines and circles. For the division furthermore manifests a declination (ὕφεσις) from the one (absolute) soul which is a whole of the parts and a procession again into the soul that is the wholeness in the part, for the sum total of all the parts is found in each of the straight lines and in each of the circles (i.e., in the χ and the circles into which it is bent).

Hence he divides this whole discussion concerning the psychogony into three parts, conformably to the three souls that have been mentioned; one subsisting according to the combining (συγκρατικής) activity, another according to the harmonizing (ἁρμοσστικής) activity, and another according to the shaping (σχηματιστικής) activity of intellect.

Having therefore distinguished among the three principal phases of the psychogony, he also distinguishes the souls by speaking only of the seven portions (1 2 3 4 9 8 27) as pertaining to the distribution of the universal soul that is divided into parts. Referring these terms likewise to the division by wholes, he thinks it necessary that celestial natures should be produced by this soul from the duple series (1 2 4 8), but sublunary natures from the triple series (1 3 9 27).

For he distributes appropriate numbers to each of the elements, to earth indeed 7, to fire 11, to water 9, and to air 13.

For the geometrical proportion, which is 1 2 4 (sum = 7) pertains to earth, perhaps indeed on account of the name (*geo*metrical); and perhaps also because, as earth contains the remaining elements, so the geometric (proportion) comprehends the other means.

But the arithmetical proportion which pertains to water is 2 3 4 (sum = 9); because it has two terms (2, 4) in common with earth (1 2 4), and likewise because water is especially inclined to multiplication and consists of an element which is the most multitudinous of all others, viz. the icosahedron (i.e., has more elementary triangles than earth [the cube], air [the octahedron], and fire [the pyramid]; cf. *Timaeus* 55AB).

And the harmonic proportion, which pertains to air, is 3 4 6; because it has two of its terms (3, 4) in common with the arithmetical mean (2 3 4), which are the greatest in the arithmetic proportion, but the least terms in the harmonic proportion. Since, however, the harmonic mean is of two kinds, the extremes being either in the duple or in the triple ratio—for Plato assumes it as the mean of either the duple or triple terms—hence (Theodore), by making the extremes to be 3 and 6 according to the duple ratio, obtains the peculiar element of the air, viz. the octahedron, which has 6 according to the (solid) angles, but 4 [plane angles comprising a solid angle] according to the base of the two pyramids, and 3 according to the triangular surfaces of the octahedron. But according to the other harmonic proportion, which is 2 3 6, he obtains the element of fire because these have the two terms, 3 and 6, in common with the terms prior to them, which in the other harmonic proportion (3 4 6) are the extremes (ἄκροι), but are in this harmonic proportion (2 3 4) the greatest terms and because the element of fire has 6 sides, twice the tetrad [of 4 plane angles] in its angles and surfaces, and a triangular base.

Very appropriately, therefore, does 7 pertain to earth, 9 to water, 13 to air, but 11 to fire, the ratios being given in the above-mentioned numbers, from which are produced these numbers: for 7 = 1 + 2 + 4; 9 = 2 + 3 + 4; 13 = 3 + 4 + 6; and 11 = 2 + 3 + 6, each having two terms in common with the number next to it, just as the elements have two (triangular) sides in common.

Now the composition of these numbers gives the series of triplets. In the [two] triplets in the middle, the greatest terms in the one are the smallest terms in the other; in the [two] triplets at the extremes, the greatest terms form the extremes of the neighboring triplets. So also with earth and water (2 and 4 are the extreme terms of the triplet 2, 3, 4 of water and the greatest terms of the triplet 1, 2, 4 of earth), and similarly with the triplets below [those of] fire and air as he relates the given terms (3 and 6 are the extreme terms in the triplet 3, 4, 6 of air, and the greatest terms in the triplet 2, 3, 6 of fire). Again, he attributes the number 15 to celestial natures; the monad indeed, to the circle of Same, but the double hebdomad (2 × 7 = 14) to the circle of Different, on account of the double revolution of each star, since the spheres themselves are seven as well as the stars contained in them being also seven.[30]

Now these things, which are mathematically expressed, bring with them a not inelegant theory. But how they are assimilated to the things presently under discussion, and how they may be interpreted in Pythagorean terms, is not all noticed by Theodore, in such a way as to be able to satisfy him who does not negligently attend to what Plato says. All these particulars are indeed elegantly invented, but he refers the analysis of the Platonic diagram only to monadic numbers (1 2 3 4 9 8 27), not looking to the ratios result-

30. According to Charles MUGLER (*apud* A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *Proclus: Commentaire sur le Timée* [5 vols.; Bibliothèque des textes philosophiques; Paris: J. Vrin et CNRS, 1966-1968], 3.164), Proclus' triple series (τριπλάσιος στίχος) can be represented by the following table:

Triplet	Terms	Sum	Corresponding Element
I	1 2 4	7	Earth
II	2 3 4	9	Water
III	3 4 6	13	Air
IV	2 3 6	11	Fire

In the middle (μέσοι) triplets (II and III), the greatest terms of II (3 and 4) are also the smallest terms of III; in the extreme (ἄκροι) triplets (I and IV), the greatest terms are those that form the extreme terms of the nearest triplet. The extreme terms of II, (2 and 4) are the greatest terms of I, and the extreme terms of III (3 and 6) are the greatest terms of IV.

> ing from them, so as include everything, viz. the means, the sesquialter (ἡμιόλιος, $^{3}/_{2}$), and sesquitertian (ἐπιτρίτης, $^{4}/_{3}$) ratios, the sesquioctaves (ἐπόγδοος, $^{9}/_{8}$), and leimmas ($^{256}/_{243}$); it being by no means possible to discover these in the primary numbers, which he employs in the above-mentioned distributions into the elements and the heavens. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* II 215,30-218,20)

Here, it can be seen that Theodore's psychic realm, like that of Iamblichus, is tripartite, consisting of an undivided, continuous Absolute Soul representing the unified soul substance of Plato's *Timaeus* prior to its division, and two further souls that undergo division, a Universal Soul identified as the circle of the Same that manifests the numerical harmonic ratios of the entire soul substance prior to its division into the circles of the Same and the Different (1 2 3 4 9 8 27 and the intervening harmonic means not specified by Theodore), and finally the Soul of the All or World Soul, identified as the circle of the Different which undergoes an additional division into the orbits of the seven planets, and is characterized by geometrical shapes. Theodore then goes on to relate the duple subseries (1 2 4 8) to celestial natures and the triple subseries (1 3 9 27) to sublunary natures, among which he distributes the four elements earth, water, air, and fire according to the arithmetic, geometric, and harmonic ratios that can be formed from the terms of both series. These three psychic hypostases are interrelated somewhat as in Iamblichus, except that Theodore prefers the terminology whole-before-the-parts, whole-of-the-parts, and the whole-in-the-parts to Iamblichus' terms unparticipated, participated, and participating or in-participation. This threefold structure of the psychic realm thus has a superficial resemblance to the threefold psychic realm of *Marsanes* that consists of the Self-generated Ones, the Repentance, and the Sojourn.

One interesting feature of Theodore's rather excessive attempts to relate his metaphysics to every detail of Plato's psychogony is his odd and textually unjustifiable notion that Plato (*Timaeus* 41D) spoke of two mixing bowls which Theodore identifies with his Universal Soul and All-Soul respectively:

> The above-mentioned Theodore therefore makes a double crater, a first (crater), a second (crater), and as third, the mixture of the second (or "of difference [ἑτερότης] and sameness [ταὐτότης]": read θατέρου ταὐτοῦ for θατέρου τούτου?)—for according to him the second crater is the mixture—and further, as portions of the mixture, he posits the soul of the universe, the souls of the celestial gods, and our souls. For he calls absolute soul the "first crater," and the universal soul he calls both the "second crater" and at the same time the "mixture," even though Plato speaks of one crater and makes in it the mixture of all the souls, some primarily and some secondarily, but makes no mention whatever of a second crater nor of a mixture in it. For what would be the use of a second crater, since the first was sufficient for the generation of our souls? (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.246,32-247,11)

B. A. Pearson[31] raises the interesting question whether or not *Marsanes* too may have referred to this mixing bowl in a passage (X 4,24-5,17) concerning Marsanes' contemplation of relation between the intelligible and sensible realms and the psychic interface between the two; although the context has clearly to do with various spiritual beings as well as human souls, it seems that the "mixing" involved is actually the joining of souls with bodies, a task that the *Timaeus* assigns to the younger gods:

> **X 4** [24] For it is I who have [25] [contemplated (νοεῖν)] that which truly exists. [26] [Whether] individually or [27] [as a whole], by difference [28] [I knew] that they [pre]-exist [29] [in the] entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm) that is 5 [1] eternal: all those that have come into [2] existence whether without substance [3] or with substance, those who are [4] unbegotten, and the divine aeons [5] together with the angels and the [6] souls without guile [7] and the soul-[garments], [8] the images of [the] [9] simple ones (souls?). And [afterwards *they*] [10] *were mixed with* [those that were distinct from] [11] them (i.e., their bodies?). But [even the] [12] entire [perceptible] substance [13] still resembles the [intelligible substance] [14] as well as the insubstantial. [I have known] [15] the entire corruption [of the former (the perceptible realm)] [16] as well as the immortality of [17] the latter (fem., i.e., the intelligible and insubstantial).

In addition to their absolute existence, on a lower level each member of the psychic triad also has a corresponding existence "in relation" to celestial and earthly natures, rather as the soul informs and preserves the body according to the various ways the whole can be related to the part. In this way, Proclus notes that Theodore can find a place for the gods of traditional mythology listed in *Timaeus* 40E-41A as the powers that govern the motion of every level of the perceptible world:

> I know also that the admirable Theodore establishes both these powers (heaven and earth) in the first life that subsists in relation. For it is in the world soul's life-in-relation, after having descended to itself and again re-

31. "Introduction" to Marsanes, in *Nag Hammadi Codices IX and X*, ed. *idem* and S. Giversen (Nag Hammadi Studies 15; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 247.

> turned to the originary (πηγαῖα) soul with difference, that the three primary relations pertaining to wholeness are immediately to be observed. And the first of these (relations) consists of the wholeness that exists apart from the "wholeness of two sides" and possesses the wholeness of the whole prior to the parts that completely returns to the wholeness of the originary soul. But the second (relation) preserves the wholeness of the originary soul, yet divides itself into parts and possesses the wholeness that consists of parts. And the third (relation) fragments the originary (πηγαῖα) soul, but preserves itself as a whole [in parts]. And in the first of these three (relations), [Theodore says that] Earth and Heaven are contained, for the material nature existing in the first term is called "Earth," matter being thus denominated by the ancient theologians, and the intellect in the first term is called "Heaven" insofar as it marks a separation between what comes last and what is in-relation for the first time and insofar as it constitutes this (visible) heaven by means of its own relation to it. At least in our own case too, the relation of the soul to the body likewise preserves the body. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.173,24-174,13)

In Theodore's doctrine of the three totalities (ὁλότητες), the "life-in-relation" is the life that each of the three souls of the psychic realm has in relation to the life that belongs to each of the three demiurges (Being, Mind, Life) from whom it proceeds, and which is imparted to each soul according to the totality that exists before, results from, and is included in each of the parts. Theodore also makes these "souls-in-relation" correspond to the gods of mythology conceived as inferior deities assigned to the three major divisions of the cosmos:

> Theodore, however, places earth and heaven in the first part of the previously mentioned first triad, according to "animation in relation," I mean, in the first of the wholes prior to the parts, and considers Heaven as analogous to the intellectual, but Earth according to the material nature; and of the rest, that which subsists according to the whole from parts, he calls "Ocean," but the third, which subsists according to the wholeness in a part, he denominates "Tethys." (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.178,7-13)

> That we may speak, however, about each of these gods (Phorcys, Saturn, Rhea), Theodore refers souls that subsist in relation to these divinities, and arranges them as presiding over the three divisions of the world. And he arranges Phorcys in the starless sphere as moving the orbit of the universe (Φορκύς = φορὰν κύει). He ought however to persuade us that Plato was acquainted with a certain starless sphere before he places Phorcys in this sphere. But he places Kronos (as a monadic entity) over the motion of the stars, because time and the generation and corruption of things is from these (Κρόνος = χρόνος). And he places Rhea (as a dyadic entity) over the material part of the world, because by materiality she exceeds the divinities prior to herself. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.187,16-24)

> But Theodore, again dividing "the life-in-relation" that animates the material realm, and forming it as he is accustomed to do into triads, calls "Zeus" the power that governs the upper region as far as the air; but "Hera" the power who is allotted the aerial part of the world; and he names "their brethren" the gods that give completion to the remaining parts. For Zeus is the essential element of the soul that subsists in a material habit (relation), because there is nothing more vital than essence. But Hera is the intellectual part of such a soul, because the natures on the earth are governed by the productive principles proceeding from the air. And the other number is the psychic distributed into particulars. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.190,10-19)

The various levels over which these deities or powers preside remind one somewhat of the various levels of the sense-perceptible realm—incorporeal and well as corporeal—named in *Marsanes*' first five Seals: the Repentance, Sojourn, and the corporeal realm of "passion and division" of the first three Seals, which *Zostrianos* articulates into the three realms of the "Aeonic Copies" (ἀντίτυποι), the atmosphere (γῆ ἀερώδη), and "the thirteen aeons" of the archon of creation (i.e., the planetary region, the sublunar atmosphere, and the sensible realm about the earth). Proclus is rather critical of Theodore's doctrine of correspondences or "relations" (σχέσεις) as conferring too exalted a status on human souls in the lower realms, in a way reminiscent of Plotinus' criticism of the Gnostics in *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 5:

> And so much for (i.e., against) those who fancy that our soul is consubstantial with the soul of the universe and other (divine) souls, and that we are irresistibly all things, the planets, the fixed stars, and other thing in the same way as those are, as Theodore of Asine also somewhere says. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.246,23-27)

A tabular summary of Theodore's metaphysical hierarchy would be:

First Principles	**Ineffable Transcendent First One** [ἕν]
The Noetic Plane	**Second One** – τριὰς νοητή (The Aspiration [*H*], the E, and N of the Ineffable *Hen*)
	Intellectual Depth (universal intellect) (*Existing* *Thinking* *Living*)
	Demiurgical Depth (divisible/dividing intellect) *Being* (ουσιώδη νοῦς: ἀμερίστος οὐσία, (indivisible, source of arithmetic ratio) *Mind* (νόερος οὐσία: μεριστὸς οὐσία· ταὐτον (divisible into wholes, source of harmonic ratio) *Life* (ζωτικὸς οὐσία· θάτερον; prefigurative πηγαῖα Soul) [divisible into individuals, source of geometric ratio]
Psychic Realm	**Absolute Soul** (mirrors Being of Demiurgical Depth) (originates as the mean between the universal and divisible intellects) συγκρατικὴ ἐνέργεια τοῦ νοῦ ἀμερίστος; monadically continuous. Whole-before-the-Parts (i.e., unparticipated), "First Crater" (σχέσις = Ouranos & Gaia)
	Universal (καθόλου) **Soul** (mirrors Mind of the Demiurgical Depth) (originates as a division into parts, a procession from the absolute soul) ἁρμονικὴς ἐνέργεια τοῦ νοῦ μεριστός; harmonically discrete Whole-of-the-Parts (i.e., participated), Circle of the Same, "Second Crater" (σχέσις = Okeanos)
	All-Soul (mirrors Life of the Demiurgical Depth) (originates as partial geometrical shapes, a procession from the universal soul) σχηματιστικὴ ἐνέργεια τοῦ νοῦ (geometric shapes) Whole-in-the-Parts (i.e., in participation), Circle of the Different, "Mixture" (σχέσις = Tethys)
Nature:	(encosmic gods ἐν σχέσει) Ouranos (mirrors the whole-before-the-parts) (governs intellectual/celestial natures derived from triple series)
	Gaia (mirrors the whole-before-the-parts) (governs material/sublunary natures derived from duple series)
	Okeanos (mirrors the whole-of-the-parts)
	Tethys (mirrors the whole-in-the-parts)
	Phorkys (orbit of the starless cosmic sphere)
	Kronos (orbit of the stars)
	Rhea (orbit of the planets)
	Zeus (upper atmosphere)
	Hera (lower sublunary atmosphere)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BODY, SOUL, AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN PLATONISM: DESCENT AND ASCENT

I. Body And Soul In Platonism

As Hans Jonas noted long ago,[1] the view of the soul held by most Gnostics and by the Platonists contemporary with them was determined by a commonly held world view articulated by means of metaphysical speculation; in the case of the Gnostics, this was supplemented by a reinterpretation of traditional myths, such as the Genesis creation story. Both engaged in the construction of speculative systems, based on a vertically oriented chain or hierarchy of being extending from the highest to the lowest levels of reality and perfection, in which there is a linear movement of becoming as one descends or ascends the chain. The movement downward is a devolution from the original simplicity of the divine acme, moving away stage by stage from primal perfection, unity, and integration towards realms increasingly characterized by multiplicity, deficiency, separateness, distance and alienation from the divine source. In the gnostic myths, the sequence of the unfolding of the higher to the lower world proceeds in terms of dramatic episodes, personified aeonic beings, sexual procreation, and the praising of the parent by the offspring. In Platonic metaphysics, it proceeds in terms of arithmetical progression from unity to plurality, hypostatic universal principles, the shift from potentiality to actuality, and the contemplative reversion of the product on its source. Typically, this descent results in the incarnation—for good or ill—of the soul in the body, whether of the cosmic soul in the cosmic body, or the human soul in the human body. Movement upward in the chain constitutes a salvific reintegration and reunion of entities lower in the chain with their immediately suprajacent ground

1. H. Jonas, "The Soul in Gnosticism and Platonism," in *Philosophical Essays: From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974), 324-334 (first appeared in *Le Néoplatonisme* [Colloques internationaux du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969; Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1971]).

and source, stage by stage, until reunification with the primal source is achieved. For humans the way of ascent and union with the primal source can only be achieved epistemically, by coming to know God.

Projected onto the temporal, horizontal axis, this diastolic and systolic movement generates an inner history of fall and redemption, ignorance and knowledge, descent and ascent, and decline and restoration in an attempt to explain and resolve the extreme polarization between the two ends of the scale of being. How could something so limiting and burdensome as this world and embodied human existence have sprung from so pure and perfect an origin? What would have caused or motivated the supreme being to compromise its perfection and self-completeness by adding to itself a world, whether by a creative fiat such as that of the biblical God, or by the desire of an ungrudging demiurge to communicate goodness to the maximum extent possible? Might the creation of this world owe to a fall from perfection, whether by weakness, accident or malevolence in the higher world at some point subsequent to the initial production of diversity from the primal unity? In general, it is a cosmic soul or some equivalent being to whom this failure is attributed, and it is the human soul which most acutely experiences the result of this failure and must seek its undoing by coming to know its true origin.

A. Plato

For the Greeks as far back as Homer, religion had always meant an acceptance of reality, a reality characterized by the ordinary human experience of corporeality, transitoriness and eventual death, to be dealt with in heroic defiance or tragic insight. Beginning with Plato, this reality is made unreal in comparison to an incorporeal, permanent and eternal world which is to be regarded as primary, and whose contemplation leads directly to God. This realm of being, separate from the physical and sensible world, contains the incorporeal ideas, the eternal archetypes of nearly all the distinguishable objects and concepts known to human experience, and which are innately known only through the human soul.[2] Although the soul can be greatly perturbed by the vicissitudes of

2. Plato certainly built on already available notions: the Orphic belief in a detachable soul transmigrating through multiple incarnations in which there was the possibility of an afterlife; Parmenides' distinction between a realm of pure stable being opposed to the changeable, illusory reality of the everyday; and the study of mathematics, whose objects provide a model of absolutely certain knowledge, derivable not from experience, but innately resident within the mind or soul. Socrates had inferred from these notions that the innate, eternal truth of things such as equality also held for the highest concepts of virtue such as the absolutely true, just, beautiful and good. In distinction from Parmenides' conception of the realm of pure being as a completely undifferentiated one, Socrates posited many such beings each permanently possessing a distinctive shape or form (εἶδος, ἰδέα) separate from others, and existing outside space and time, such that whatever exists in this world does so through participation in an idea.

the human body that it animates, it can nevertheless become aware of these eternal objects through a process of reflection upon, or recollection of, its innate knowledge of them acquired even prior to its bodily incarnation. This recollection is a cognitive ascent to the higher realm, which Plato portrays as a passionate, erotic quest for unification with ultimate beauty, beginning with the recognition of the beautiful in the manifold of sensible bodies and culminating in the glimpse of the pure idea of beauty itself. On these grounds, even though the body dies, the soul, having an affinity for eternally unchanging reality, does not die, but is something immortal, which can transcend the body.

By contrast, the body is the tomb of the soul, according to the famous σῶμα/σῆμα pun in Plato's *Cratylus*, a notion which seems to stem from Orphic religion:[3]

> For some say it (the body, σῶμα) is the tomb (σῆμα) of the soul, [400c] their notion being that the soul is buried in the present life; and again, because by its means the soul gives any signs which it gives, it is for this reason also properly called "sign" (σῆμα). But I think it most likely that the Orphic poets gave this name, with the idea that the soul is undergoing punishment for something; they think it has the body as an enclosure to keep it safe, like a prison, and this is, as the name itself denotes, the safe (σῶμα) for the soul, until the penalty is paid, and not even a letter needs to be changed. (*Cratylus* 400BC; cf. *Gorgias* 493A)

Thus the soul's embodiment is its true death, as opposed to the death of a living being when the soul separates from the body at death, or as opposed to the later Christian notion of one's spiritual death through sin and separation from God (cf. Paul in Rom 7:24: "Who will deliver me

3. Cf. David, *Prolegomena philosophiae* 31,9-11: "Physical life is an attachment of soul and body by which we all live and by which the body enchains the soul; that is why the body is called δέμας, as a sort of chain (δεσμός) for the soul, whence it is also called body (σῶμα), as a sort of in some manner σῆμα, that is, a tomb (τάφος) for the soul."

from this body of death?").[4] Such notions were too extreme for Plato, but not for his successors.

In the *Phaedo* (63E-107A), Plato gives three or four arguments for the immortality of the soul: its innate knowledge of eternal reality, its indissoluble simplicity, its inability to participate in death, the opposite of its own formal principle, and the necessary persistence of life over death requisite to the existence of the cosmos. During this life, the sage will seek death, understood as separating the soul as acting subject as far as possible from the body as acted subject. The soul shares in the immortality and permanence of its objects of contemplation. The notion of seeking death in this life (to be distinguished from suicide) led to the later Platonic notion of the "double death," in two senses: first the death of the soul by incorporation into the body as opposed to the natural death of the human organism at the departure of the soul, and second, the death of the body attendant on the soul's contemplative ascent from it as opposed to the natural death of the human organism.[5]

4. On body as "prison": Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* VII.62; Plato, *Cratylus* 400C; see J. MANSFELD, "Bad World and Demiurge: A 'Gnostic' Motif From Parmenides and Empedocles to Lucretius and Philo," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 91 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 261-314, esp. 291-292: Plato's notion of the body as a tomb (σῆμα) is even more pessimistic than the Orphic counterpart, "but there is no sign of pessimism in the cosmology of Philolaus." All things are held together by a *harmonia*. Ancient Orphics thought incarnation was a punishment, and that the body is a prison (see Plato, *Cratylus* 400C = *Orph. Fr.* 8 Kern, *Frg. Vorsokr.* 1B3, etc.). Mansfeld says this is not same as the *sôma/sêma* doctrine mentioned by Plato in the same passage, although they are related. "There is nothing cosmological about this crime and punishment, however; the one 'Gnostic' parallel in early Orphism is anthropological only. Of course, if, as the Orphics said, 'the body is a prison,' there must be something wrong with bodies. There is no sign, however, that human bodies were ever thought of by the Orphics as natural phenomena or that they inferred that, if these are wrong, all of nature must be wrong, too. As a matter of fact, a pessimistic anthropology is, historically speaking, perfectly compatible with an optimistic cosmology (cf. Fr. 21a Kern)." Cf. K. CORRIGAN, "Body and Soul in Ancient Religious Experience," in *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality: Egyptian, Greek, Roman*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 365-366.

5. Cf. Porphyry, *Sententiae* 9,1-4: "Death is double: the one is the congenital separation of body from soul [at death], the other of the philosophers upon separation of soul from body, and the one does not always result from the other."

The notion of the simplicity and indissolubility of the soul worked out in the *Phaedo* undergoes apparent modification in *Republic* IV (esp. 435B-441C), with its doctrine of the tripartite soul, composed of rational, spirited and appetitive parts. The existence of conflicting motives in a person, together with the principle that the same thing cannot act or be acted upon in two opposite ways at the same time, suggests that the soul itself consists of separate elements of order and disorder, for example, of reason and appetite, in dialogue with each other. To reason and appetite a third element must be added, the spirited, which, even in irrational animals, can oppose appetite and in the case of humans can agree with or be rebuked by reason.[6]

According to the myth of the *Phaedrus* (247A-252B), all souls, even those still in heaven, are portrayed as tripartite, the rational part being compared to a charioteer trying to control the other two parts conceived as two horses, the one unruly (the appetitive) and the other obedient (the spirited). In the case of the gods, these two are well balanced, affording them a continual perception of the ideas. But those of human souls are imbalanced, the good horse following the way of the gods, but the unruly horse pulling the soul downward, allowing it only a brief glimpse of the truth, after which it loses its wings and sinks back to the material world. When such incarnated souls have ended their terrestrial existence, they pass in judgment. If they lived badly, they are punished in subterranean prisons; if well, having been enlightened by their judgment and retaining the memory afforded by the glimpse they once enjoyed, they have the possibility and duty to regain their wings and return to the heights.

6. But then one might indeed wonder whether such a tripartite composite can be eternal and not subject to dissolution like the composite body. Indeed, in *Republic* X, Plato appears to suggest that this tripartiteness is only a result of the soul's association with the body. If so, then the soul's two lower parts are to be seen as accretions deriving from its association with the body, while its rational part is still regarded as simple and therefore divine and immortal as in the *Phaedo*. Indeed, according to the *Timaeus*, reason, the divine element of the soul (44D), dwells in the head; as a *daimon* given us by god, it is proof of our kinship with heaven (90A), since it alone achieves immortality. When the rational part is incarnated into a mortal body, the "mortal part of the soul" is built on (προσοικοδωμοῦν, 69C) to it. This part consists of the two lower parts made by the lesser gods, the "spirited" dwelling in the chest and the "appetitive" in the belly (72D), both presumably perishing along with the body.

All souls must submit to a series of purifications which progressively liberate them from the pollution of the body. Unlike the popular view of punishment in Tartaros or the Pythagorean view of punishment in the air, Plato views this purification as the reincarnation of souls into bodies they have chosen according to their moral disposition in their previous life.[7]

Moreover, according to the *Phaedrus*, the soul is the principle and source of movement (ἀρχὴ τῆς κινήσεως, 245D) in itself as well as in all bodies. Since that which moves itself must be prior to that which is moved, and since the movement of the world is eternal, so must the soul as source of this movement, be eternal (245C-246A). Thus, as on the human level, so also on the cosmic level there must be an intermediary between immutable, intelligible reality and mutable, corporeal reality, a soul of the entire cosmos. Just as living beings are animated by a soul, so also must the world, as the ultimate image of the absolute living being, be governed by a cosmic soul.[8]

According to the creational myth in Plato's *Timaeus* (summarized in Chapter 8), upon the completion of the cosmic soul, the all-good demiurge fashioned the immortal part of human souls from the remaining ingredients of the world soul and distributed it among the stars, one soul for each star, and then assigned to his subordinate divine offspring, the lesser, engendered gods, the task of creating and attaching two mortal parts to the immortal part of the human soul and incarnating the resulting soul into male human bodies (*Timaeus* 41D-44C; 69C-87B). The

7. Plato thus combines the two separate (Orphic) notions of purificatory punishment in Hades with that of metempsychosis: purification through reincarnation (the term μετενσωματώσις first occurs in Hippolytus, *Refutations* I.19.12). In fact, later Platonists such as Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis* II.17.13-14, identified the body into which the soul enters as the true Tartaros. K. S. GUTHRIE ("Plato's Views on the Immortality of the Soul," in *Recherches sur la Tradition Platonicienne*, Entretiens Hardt pour l'étude de l'Antiquité classique 3 [Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1955], 3-22) reconciles this depiction of a composite soul with the *Phaedo*'s notion of an incomposite soul by suggesting that the tripartite soul of the *Phaedrus* merely refers to souls which, although not presently inhabiting a particular mortal body, are nonetheless destined for reincarnation; the *Phaedo*'s doctrine of the simple, incomposite soul refers to those souls that have escaped the transmigrational cycle altogether and have returned to their origin.

8. A similar argument appears in *Philebus* 30A: "Whence does our soul originate ... unless the body of the world which has the same elements as our bodies, although in all respects more beautiful, also has a soul?"

younger gods place this soul in the head, whose spherical shape resembles the shape of the cosmos. While this immortal soul, compounded by the demiurge of the same blend of being, sameness and difference found in the cosmic soul was a rational intellect (νοῦς) having its seat in the brain, the younger gods located the active "spirited" part in the thorax where it acts through the blood and is tempered by the lungs, and placed the passive "appetite" at a point below the diaphragm, where it is bound down and chained like a wild animal led by phantoms and visions night and day. These inferior parts constitute in effect a mortal, corruptible soul subject to various impulses and passions.[9] Moreover, the body into which the engendered gods place this tripartite soul—part mortal and part immortal—is composed of the primal elements of the universe that originated as "the works of necessity" and is therefore partially subject to their disordered movement. Unfortunately, just as in the case of the demiurge, so also in the case of human intelligence, Intellect can only persuade physical necessity but not completely master it.

A topic of future debate was to be whether one should regard this elemental necessity positively, as a passive receptacle responsive to divine persuasion, or negatively, as a positive or even proactive principle of irrational disorder, indeed, of evil.[10] The absence of such evil among the gods and its necessary presence within the mortal realm provokes Socrates in the *Theaetetus* (176AB) to advise rapid flight from this world, to become "assimilated to God so far as possible."

9. Pleasure, pain, rashness, fear, anger, misled hope, irrational sense, all-daring love, and the chief diseases of the soul: madness, ignorance, derangement by excessive pain and pleasure, and sexual incontinence by undue bodily influence (cf. also *Timaeus* 91 and the passions of Sophia in gnostic mythology). For a long time these perturb the two divine circles of the immortal part, making clear thought impossible for human beings during infancy and adolescence, but they may be brought to clarity by the appropriate training and exercise of sight, which, once acquainted with visible shapes, enables our intelligence to learn to intuit the Ideas and ideal numbers.

10. A similar notion is implied in the *Statesman* (269C-273E), where the stranger mentions two world ages, one, the age of Kronos, in which God governs the rotation of the world, and another, the age of Zeus, in which he relinquishes control to the stored-up momentum of the cosmos, producing an innate rotation in the contrary direction which tends to chaos and great destruction. Eventually God once again rewinds the cosmos, returning everything to its original chaotic state prior to childhood whence everything is once more reborn. Humankind is thus born from and dissolved back into the earth an appointed number of times; when controlled by god, virtue results, when abandoned by god, forgetfulness of God's instruction caused by the body results in disorder and increasing evil.

All these accounts of the soul and the government of the universe have so far assumed a single soul—be it tripartitioned or not, or be it the soul of the cosmos or that of human beings—which can choose affiliation with a realm, either of order or disorder, which is external to the soul. This picture, however, is complicated by another portrayal of the composite nature of the soul *Laws* X (896D-904B), which raises the possibility of the existence of, not just a single, albeit tripartitioned, soul, but of two separate souls, one good and the other evil, and not merely within humanity, but even on the cosmic plane. The logic here seems to be the following: to account for the presence of evil as well as good, there must be two souls (or two kinds of soul) governing the universe: one, which has supreme control, is responsible for good, and the other for its opposite. The soul that acts in accordance with intelligence (νοῦς) causes good, beautiful, and just things on earth, but the soul that does not, causes bad, ugly and unjust things (*Laws* X 896C-897A).[11]

Many scholars, however, doubt that Plato could have envisioned the existence of a positive principle of evil in the universe. Thus, according to Festugière, *Laws* X speaks not of the coexistence of two souls, one good and the other evil, but rather affirms that there can be only one soul governing the universe.[12] Plato is instead posing the question of whether this soul is good or evil, and shows that the soul which moves the heavens, whether it be one or multiple (a soul for each planet), can only be good, since its motion and that of the heavens is perfectly circular. For Plato, only the irregular motion of matter can be responsible for evil, but since such matter is never left to itself and is always ordered by god, there is no cosmic evil, but only limited evil on the cosmic plane due to the disorderliness of matter, and temporary evil on the human plane caused by souls overly attracted to the needs of the body.[13] As we

11. In addition to reason, Plato attributes to the soul also the causation of such things as "affection, reflection, forethought, counsel, true and false opinion, joy, grief, confidence, fear, hate, love and all the motions similar to these," which are prior to the body, thus suggesting what seem to be aspects of a composite soul: cf. the Gnostic notion of the passions of the agitated Sophia. The soul, alone capable of spontaneous motion, is cause of all, the contraries of good and evil alike. Lifeless matter is inert and can never initiate motion, although it can transmit it.

12. Cf. A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste II: Le Dieu cosmique*, Études bibliques (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1949), 125-126.

13. The soul of the cosmos as a whole rules the heavens such that they have the same nature as the motion, rotation and ratiocination of νοῦς itself (*Laws* X 897B-D), thus the world soul must be good rather than evil. Whether Plato actually entertained the notion that the world soul might be evil or the cause of evil is unlikely or at least debatable. For our purposes, the notion of an evil soul would certainly apply to ordinary souls, and to those souls still involved in the transmigrational process rather than the souls of the philosophers and gods who stand outside it, which are good by nature. Since in the *Laws* (X 899B) and elsewhere (*Theaetetus*, *Phaedo*) the souls of the astral gods are perfectly good, evil can only be worked in the sublunary sphere where contact with the physical causes forgetfulness of the good and temptation to evil. Cf. also H. CHERNISS, "The Sources of Evil according to Plato," in *Plato: A collection of Critical Essays*. II: Ethics, Politics, and Philosophy of Art and Religion, ed. G. Vlastos (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), 244-258.

shall see, however, beginning in the second century of our era, not a few Platonists had their doubts about the absolute goodness of the world, and invoked this passage of the *Laws* as well as other Platonic passages that could be read in its light, in order to explain what must have been a popular perception of the existence of evil on a grand scale. Gnostics were by no means alone in this perception.

B. Plato's "Unwritten Doctrines"

In Chapter 8, I have tried to show how Plato in his later years devoted his efforts to formulating exactly how the ideal forms were related to their phenomenal copies, and began to develop his ideas concerning ultimate principles that not only transcended the forms, but also gave rise to them, and to the phenomenal world as well. According to the reports of various authors, Plato's primal principles were the One and an opposing principle, the Indefinite Dyad.[14] When limited by the One, the Dyad, serving as a sort of mold (Aristotle, *Met.* I 987b33-4, cf. *Timaeus* 50C), gives rise to a set of ideal mathematical entities. These are not the numbers of ordinary calculation, but their ideas, sharing the changelessness of all the ideas, and the multiplicity associated with ordinary numbers. In addition to these mathematicals, and perhaps derived from them, there is also a realm of geometrical entities. Referring to the *Timaeus*, Aristotle (*De anima* 404b) says that Plato conceived these geometrical entities to be the paradigm of the cosmic soul, the Animal-itself, as composed of the Idea of the One and the primary length and

14. The Dyad is responsible for change and multiplicity in the realm of pure being, while the One causes unity, identity and permanence. The One acts by imposing limit on the unlimitedness of the Dyad, which latter Plato may have identified with the chaotic principle of necessity and disorder he called the "receptacle of becoming" in the *Timaeus* 48E-52D.

breadth. Thus, according to Aristotle, the cosmic soul was regarded as the place (τόπος) of the ideas, receiving the ideas and transforming them into mathematicals ("many the same" and "combinable" as opposed to the unique and uncombinable [ἀσύμβλητοι] character of the ideas), and then projecting them upon matter to form the physical world.[15] As in the *Timaeus*, the soul seems to be the supreme mediating entity between the intelligible and sensible worlds, in which incorporeal ideas receive numerical diversity and geometrical extension prior to their incorporation in matter. Although it is unclear exactly how Plato conceived these notions, it is clear that they became a preoccupation of almost all subsequent Platonists concerned with the relation of body and soul.

C. The Old Academy

Plato's immediate successors posited a hierarchy of supreme principles in which the identification between the world soul and mathematicals becomes quite explicit. Thus Speusippus apparently rejected Plato's transcendent realm of ideas in favor of a realm of true being consisting of mathematical and geometrical entities. These were located between an ultimate One beyond being and the cosmic soul in which these numbers were combined with matter. On the other hand, Xenocrates seems to have banished such mathematicals to the level of the cosmic soul and reinstated Plato's transcendent ideas, among which he also included certain (ideal?) numbers, locating them in the mind of a supreme Monad. Plato's ideal forms (and ideal numbers) tended to be conceived as a divine Mind. At a lower level, there was the cosmic soul, containing mathematical and geometrical entities.[16]

In effect, Speusippus developed a four-level hierarchy of reality in which the cosmic soul occupies the lowest level, where evil first begins to appear owing to a failure of the higher, formative principle to master completely the material principle proper to that level. He identified the

15. *De anima* 429a27; *Met.* I.6; XIII.6. In the soul, the four primary numbers become the geometrical entities point, line, plane and solid corresponding to the four modes of cognition, intuitive knowledge (νόησις), discursive knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), opinion (δόξα), and perception (αἴθησις; *De anima* I 404b16 ff.; cf. *Laws* 894A and perhaps the second-level διάνοια of *Republic* VI 511A-E).

16. See J. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B. C. to A. D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 6-29.

cosmic soul with geometricals, distinguished from mathematicals by having form and extension. As "the Form (ἰδέα) of the everywhere extended,"[17] the soul receives number and geometrical extension from above, which then combine with matter to produce the psychic realm, which, when projected onto matter, forms the physical world.

Xenocrates too located mathematicals and geometrical entities at the level of soul, defining it as "self-moving number," thus introducing the principle of motion as well.[18] As such, the cosmic soul is eternal and uncreated by any deity. Within human beings, Xenocrates considered the soul to be a daemon resident within the body, much as Plato had conceived the highest part of the soul to be a daemon given by god to each man (*Timaeus* 90A).

D. Early Middle Platonic Doctrines of the Soul

As described in Chapter 9, the metaphysical systems developed by Platonists in the first century are all characterized by hierarchical levels of being extending from the physical realm to the supreme being, in which each level seems to be hypostatized as an individual entity, a process brought to completion by Plotinus. These schemes all agree on a hierarchy consisting of 1) the realm of pure being conceived as a divine mind containing the Platonic ideas as its thoughts, followed by 2) a cosmic soul as the demiurgic instrument of this mind by which it operated on the lowest realm, 3) the sensible world. On the other hand, these schemes can be classified generally into two groups, depending on whether an additional level beyond even the pure being of the divine mind is placed above the other three levels.[19] The importance of this for

17. Ἡ ἰδέα τοῦ πάντῃ διαστατοῦ, Iamblichus, *De anima*, *apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49,32 (I.363, 26-364,7 Wachmuth); *contra* Iamblichus, *De comm. math.* 40,15-16 Festa. The all-extended are geometricals, distinguished from mathematicals by having both form and extension.

18. Τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν οὐσίαν ἀριθμὸν αὐτὸν ὑφ' ἑαυτοῦ κινούμενον (Plutarch, *De animae proc.* 1012D3). According to Plutarch, Xenocrates interpreted *Timaeus* 35A by identifying the undivided essence with the One and the divided essence with Multiplicity (the unlimited Dyad), which together generate number, to which in turn is added motion, produced from the stability of Sameness and the changeability of Otherness, to produce the moving soul.

19. See H. J. KRÄMER *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Plato und Plotin* (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1967), 193-369 and my "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *Novum Testamentum* 22 [1980], 336-337.

our present purposes is the more or less clear separation of the cosmic soul from the realm of true being, and the anthropological implications of this separation, namely, the notion that the rational aspect of the soul becomes conceived as a separable Nous or Mind to be distinguished from the rest of the soul. Rather than conceiving the human merely as a psycho-physical complex in which the divinely-originated soul is set over against the material body, this view leads to a tripartite anthropology according to which the superior and divine element is a separable intellect residing in its psycho-physical vehicle, composed of soul and body. Thus not only the body, but also the soul, becomes a kind of envelope or vehicle, perhaps even a burdensome appendage, for the divine element, the *nous* or *pneuma* resident within.

In general, the explanations of the presence of human souls on earth vary—within the limits established by Plato himself in the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic* and *Timaeus*—between the somewhat pessimistic old Pythagorean-Orphic idea of the pre-natal sin and fall into the cycle of birth and death and the more optimistic idea that souls, with their divine nature, are sent down below by the higher divine powers to help them in their work below.[20]

In late first century BCE Alexandria, Eudorus, an important influence on Philo, is reported by Plutarch to be in substantial agreement with the doctrine of Xenocrates and his disciple Crantor that the world soul is eternal and is the medium through which numbers give rise to the three-

20. The return to interest in Platonic metaphysics began with Antiochus of Ascalon. Having taken up with Old Academic doctrine through the eyes of Aristotle and Polemon, he was teaching basically Stoic doctrine under the name of original Platonism. He seems to have identified the Demiurge and World Soul of Plato's *Timaeus* with the Stoic Pneuma-Logos, and the Ideas constituting the paradigm of the Living Being with the *logoi spermatikoi* comprising the intellect of the Stoic Logos. In doing this, he may have originated the Middle Platonic notion of the Ideas as the thoughts of God. See H. DÖRRIE, "Die Erneuerung des Platonismus im ersten Jahrhundert vor Christus," in *Le Néoplatonisme, Colloques internationaux du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Royaumont 9-13 juin 1969* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1971), 17-28. Another Platonizing Stoic, Posidonius, distinguished between a higher rational part of the soul, subordinate to the Logos, and a lower irrational part of the soul, obedient to the passions (frg. 186, 187), and taught that the soul (at least its rational part) was separable from the body (frg. 108) as in dreams, and affirmed the soul's survival at least for a while after death (frg. 110; although he interpreted *Phaedrus* 245-246 to mean that only the cosmic soul is truly immortal). As we shall see, Plutarch follows these ideas without hesitation.

dimensional perceptible world. According to Dillon,[21] Crantor held the soul to be a mixture of the νοητὴ οὐσία and "what forms impressions of perceptible objects by means of opinion," i.e. a link between the intelligible and sensible worlds.

E. Philo

For Philo of Alexandria, the Logos replaces Plato's demiurge and cosmic soul as the instrument (ὄργανον) through which the utterly transcendent God creates and governs the world. The Logos thus can have two levels, one as the transcendent place of the paradigmatic ideas, and a lower, immanent and demiurgic level, where it shapes unformed matter according to the numbers and proportions which it contains as images of those paradigmatic ideas.[22]

As regards individual souls, Philo's thought is often traditionally Platonic, based upon Plato's tripartition of the soul into rational, spirited and appetitive parts, although on occasion he also adopts the Stoic division into the governing principle (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν) and the faculties of the five senses and of speech and reproduction. Yet Philo can go to the point of distinguishing two souls in human beings, a higher rational and immortal soul, the intellect or immaterial *pneuma*, and a lower, irrational and immortal soul, a nutritive principle, sometimes called a blood-soul (cf. *Timaeus* 82C). In his interpretation of Gen 1:26 (Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν) in terms of a double creation of the human in Genesis 1 and 2, Philo distinguishes between two beings, 1) the archetypal Anthropos created after the divine image (κατ' εἰκόνα), an ideal entity conceived as the intellect resident within 2) the earthly man molded after the likeness (καθ' ὁμοίωσιν), who is a compound of body and soul. This notion of two souls and two primordial human beings undergoes significant development within both

21. *The Middle Platonists*, 131-132.

22. As pointed out in Chapter 9, p. 359, Philo's Logos replaces Plato's cosmic soul as the representation of God's immanent presence in the world. The Logos seems to consist of two levels, a transcendent one which is the noetic cosmos containing the ideas corresponding to Plato's paradigm, and an immanent one, which is demiurgic, shaping unformed and infinitely divisible matter according to the numbers and geometrical entities and proportions which it itself contains as images of those paradigmatic ideas.

the Platonic and specifically gnostic sources of the second century.[23] As to the descent of the soul into human bodies, Philo allows various reasons, chief among which are excessive satiety with their original heavenly estate, and, for the wise, a chance to improve the soul by the practice of human morality during a temporary sojourn in the body. Upon death, only the souls of the great attain a definite place among the stars, while the rest are presumably recycled into the world-soul.[24]

F. Later Middle Platonism and the Irrational Soul

Between Philo and Numenius, it seems that Middle Platonism had developed a dualistic ontology which so radically separated the intelligible and sensible worlds that it was impossible to maintain Plato's view of the mediatory and unifying function of the soul. Later, under Stoic influence, Plotinus tries to reaffirm the continuity and unity of the entire cosmos, but is unable to effect a complete reconciliation between the Stoic's more animistic view of the soul's natural dispersion throughout the material realm with the more Orphic view of the soul's descent as evil, and of the body as a tomb for the soul.

In regard to the human soul, the Platonism of the first two centuries exhibits a division of opinion concerning the reason for the soul's pres-

23. Philo, *QG* II 59; *Fuga* 67; *Det.* 82-83; *Opif.* 134; cf. Dillon, *Middle Platonists* 174-175; the blood-soul occurs in certain Sethian treatises: the *Apocryphon of John* II 15,20; *On the Origin of the World* II 109,19-28.

24. J. DILLON, "The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory," *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale, March 28-31, 1978* Vol. 2. Sethian Gnosticism, ed. B. Layton (Supplements to *Numen* 41. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 357-364, refers to *Heres* 240, attributing the soul's fall to satiety (κόρος) with its happy state: those possessed by "high flying" thoughts may win their return to the heavenly, divine region, but those occupied by downward-tending thoughts are doomed to wander about here forever. As to the purposes of the soul's descent, Dillon refers to *Conf.* 77-78: "That is why all whom Moses calls wise are represented as sojourners (παροικοῦντες). Their souls never set out as colonists to leave heaven for a new home, but their way is rather to visit earthly nature as men who travel abroad to see and learn. So when they have stayed awhile in their bodies and beheld through them all that sense and mortality has to show, they make their way back home to the place from which they set out at first, regarding as their fatherland the heavenly regions where they exercise their citizenship, and as a foreign land the earthly region in which they have become sojourners." One may wonder whether this concept of sojourners may lie behind the aeonic level of the Sojourn described in *Zostrianos* and mentioned in *Marsanes*; see Chapter 13.

ence in the world. Either it is the necessary result of there being a universe at all, and so essentially a good thing—the view of a few Gnostics and a few Platonists like Plotinus—or else it is a disaster due to some past sin or willfulness which must be undone as soon as possible—the view of many other Gnostics and Platonists. And even if the soul's presence in the body is not to be explained by some ancient transgression, almost all agreed that is still possible for it to acquire guilt (or merit) by its behavior while in the body. In either case, freedom from the body is to be recommended, but there is a difference in attitude to the world.[25]

On the cosmic plane, not a few Middle Platonists conceived the (sometimes dormant!) cosmic soul to consist of two levels: one, a rational level possessing its own mind which God causes to contemplate the divine mind and thus receive form and shape, and another, lower level, which is regarded sometimes as demiurgic and sometimes as

25. So J. DILLON, "The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory," in *Rediscovery*, 2.357-364. Dillon quotes Iamblichus' treatise *On the Soul* (Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.39,44-53, 378-379 Wachsmuth): "The Platonists of the school of Taurus say that souls are sent by the gods down to earth: some, following the *Timaeus*, declare it to be for the completion of the universe, that there be as many living things in the cosmos as there are in the intelligible realm, while others describe the purpose of descent as the manifestation of divine life, since this, they say, is the will of the gods, to make their divinity manifest through the medium of souls, for the gods advance to a visible state and reveal themselves through the pure and uncontaminated life of souls." The first view represents the optimistic wing of Platonism, based on the *Timaeus*, while the second seems more typical of Christian Platonism, such as that of Origen. Yet, Dillon notes, not all Platonists were so world-affirming. Albinus' (Alcinous') *Didaskalikos* XXV, more or less contemporary with Taurus (mid-second century) gives at least four reasons for the soul's descent: 1) the necessary purpose of maintaining the proper number of souls in the universe; 2) the will of the gods (probably to make themselves manifest); 3) more negatively, the "wantonness" (ἀκολασία) of the individual soul that precipitates its "fall" (which Iamblichus calls derangement, παράνοια, or deviation, παρέκβασις); and 4) a love of the body based on a natural and innate affinity (οἰκείωσις) between body and soul, which, once they come into proximity, attract each other like fire and asphalt. Iamblichus (Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.39,54-7) derives from this two basic causes of the descent, one voluntary, the soul choosing to administer the terrestrial realm, and the other, the involuntary and forcible, drawing down of the soul "to what is worse than it." Once incarnated, Iamblichus distinguishes two ways in which the soul may relate to the body: "the pure and perfect souls settle in bodies in a pure manner without succumbing to passions and without deprivation of the power of intellection, while the opposite is the case for souls of a contrary character" (Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.40,12-15).

downright irrational.[26] The classic instance is the second God in the metaphysics of Numenius,[27] yet similar notions occur not only in Plutarch, but also in the *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous/Albinus.[28]

Another striking feature of second and third century teaching concerning the cosmic soul is the notion that evil in the universe is to be explained by the presence therein of an evil soul. Actually, one has to do here with a long tradition of the exegesis of Plato's dialogues, particularly *Laws* X 896E-897D (and *Timaeus* 52-53), beginning in some cases with the Old Academy, and coupled sometimes with the old Pythagorean dualistic doctrine of opposites (the monad, odd, straight, male etc. versus the dyad, even, crooked, female etc.).[29]

26. DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, 284.

27. It is a mind in motion, which, alternating between contemplation of the inert and monadic Mind or first God above (in which act it is self-generated) and its demiurgical occupation with Matter below, is split by Matter into what amounts to a second and third God. The second God is equivalent to the rational part of the world soul, while the third God is regarded as a lower irrational and evil soul.

28. So far, it seems that the bipartitioning of the cosmic soul is a phenomenon that arose, not directly from Plato, but from later sources. One source might be the two-opposed-principles doctrine of the late Plato and the Old Academy, possibly harmonized with later Neopythagorean speculation concerning the derivation of the dyad from the monad, or of a monad and dyad and the rest of the numbers from a One transcending even these. Another source might be the fortuitous conflation of the rational world soul of the *Timaeus* with the irrational soul described *Laws* X 896D-897D. Although a demiurgical separation of the cosmic soul into a higher rational and a lower irrational component which becomes matter does not occur in the *Timaeus*, such a division might have been suggested by the juxtaposition between "the movement of the other" and "the movement of the same" in *Timaeus* 35B4-C2 (distinguished respectively by the sphere of the ever uniform versus the sphere of becoming, and the sphere of Mind and knowledge versus that of opinion and belief, 37A-C), and/or between the two strips of soul-stuff placed cross-wise to each other in *Timaeus* 36B6-D1, a juxtaposition that may have encouraged subsequent interpreters as Xenocrates, Philo, Numenius, and Plutarch to view the cosmic soul as a dyad (see Chapter 8 on Xenocrates). In addition, various thinkers may have discovered an irrational aspect of the cosmic soul in the disorderly movement of the receptacle in *Timaeus* (52D-53A), viewed as a kind of precosmic, irrational soul prior to its ordering by the demiurge (cf. the Isis figure of Plutarch discussed in Chapter 9).

29. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, 7, notes a tendency in subsequent Middle Platonism to identify the demiurge and younger gods of the *Timaeus* with a cosmic intellect or logos conceived as the rational aspect of the world soul or, by Neopythagoreans, as a second god below the supreme One. The cosmic soul proper tends to be identified with a subrational or even irrational lower soul needing formation or awakening by the ideas, and plays somewhat the same creative role as the younger gods.

G. Plutarch

The earliest of these exegetical philosophers, Plutarch, offers the earliest and clearest instance of a metaphysics featuring both a good and an evil world-soul. In his *On the Creation of the Soul in the Timaeus* (1014D-1015C), Plutarch identifies the essence of the world soul, traditionally the principle mediating between God and matter, with the principle of the Unlimited from the *Philebus*, the all-receiving principle of necessity in the *Timaeus*, the disorderly and malificent soul of the *Laws*, and the source of the destiny and congenital desire that reverses the motion of the heavens in the *Statesman*, but which became the world-soul by partaking of reason and harmony.[30] All this is of Platonic inspiration, but in *On Isis and Osiris* (369D-370C, 371B, 372A), it almost seems as if Plutarch invokes a form of Iranian dualism by positing a proactive principle of evil in the heavens, Seth-Typhon, identified as the indefinite dyad (cause, e.g., of irrational disturbances like eclipses). On the other hand, Matter *per se* is portrayed as Isis, a passive, feminine principle eagerly desiring to submit to the good active principle of form and order in the cosmos, the demiurge Osiris, although constantly under attack by Seth-Typhon, the evil and irrational soul. As matter, which is good and divine, Isis is the honored consort of the supreme God, the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*.[31]

When it comes to the human soul, Plutarch offers two myths relating the experiences of the individual soul after its separation from the body.[32] In the myth of *On the Face in the Moon*, the earth is viewed as

30. Rather than with matter, which cannot be an active cause of anything.

31. See A. H. ARMSTRONG, "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 104-106, and Chapter 9 on Plutarch. In *On the Creation of the Soul in the Timaeus*, Plutarch identifies the "divisible substance" of *Timaeus* 35A as a disorderly and proactive cause of evil, the irrational soul of the tenth book of Plato's *Laws* X 896E. He also associates it with the principle of Necessity in the third part of the *Timaeus* (47E-48A), which Plutarch may have understood to be equated with the unlimited dyad which he elsewhere calls Seth-Typhon. Yet this evil principle is to be distinguished from the likewise disorderly, but passive, material principle derived from Plato's receptacle, which Plutarch identifies with Isis in his essay *On Isis and Osiris*.

32. The myth of Timarchus in *On the Daemon of Socrates* 590B-592E, and the myth put into the mouth of the stranger whom his friend Sextus Sulla met in Carthage in *On the Face in the Moon*, 943-944.

the source of bodies, the sun as the source of mind, and the moon—into which the sun has sown minds—as the repository of souls and producer of new souls. Upon one's death, while still upon the earth, Demeter violently separates soul from body, whereupon the soul wanders in the space between earth and moon to purge the pollutions of embodiment. Those souls that have managed to subjugate their irrational passions to reason arrive at the moon, where, in "Hecate's cave," the affective part of the soul pays the penalties for its wrongdoings in its daemonic existence. At this point, Persephone gently detaches the "true self" from the soul, namely the intellect (νοῦς) that strives towards the sun as the visible likeness of the good, leaving the substance of the soul on the moon, where it either withers away, or, in the case of those souls enamored of the body, is drawn away into another birth. To see this visible likeness of the good is the ultimate possibility for soul, which Plutarch never represents as being able to look directly upon the ideas (cf. Plato, *Republic* VII 515-516), the truly living being. For Plutarch, the human being is not merely a body conjoined with soul, but a conjunction (σύνοδος) of body plus soul plus intellect (*On the Face in the Moon* 943A-B).[33] Soul in conjunction with body produces the irrational or affective factor, and intellect in conjunction with soul produces reason;

33. After describing how souls get to the Moon and what happens to them there, he explains the descent of souls from the moon as due to the descent of daimons, incorporeal and purified souls, in order to administer the sublunar realm. But some of these, falling under the influence of some kind of passion, do not properly perform their duties, and are condemned to be confined in mortal bodies. Thus the fall of the soul takes place after its original, but necessary and beneficial descent. Plutarch also makes a clear distinction (cf. *De genio Soc.* 591D) between some souls which "sink entirely into the body" and others which "only mingle in part, leaving outside what is purest in them." The intellects of the latter are envisaged as riding quietly in heaven above their souls, "like corks we observe riding on the sea to mark nets." The earth is the home of the body, the moon of the soul and the sun of the intellect; it is a kind of natural law that each will reach its proper station at the appropriate time. Mind and soul leave the body on the earth and mind leaves soul at the moon; the sun (as demiurge) sows minds into the moon, and the moon (cf. the young gods of the *Timaeus* 41-42) sows intellectual souls into bodies. In *De genio Soc* 591D, one finds basically the same scheme, according to which the earth is the place of the mortal human soul and the moon is the realm of the generation of souls; the zone between these two is where souls are punished and purified. The moon is the asylum for purified souls, which, after purification, return to the sphere of genesis through rebirth. Some souls sink entirely into the body, others mingle only in part, the purest part remaining above.

the former conjunction is the source of pleasure and pain, the latter of virtue and vice. In *On the Daimon of Socrates* (591D), the mind is external to the body, presiding over it as its daimon.[34]

Plutarch offers the first clear example of an irrational and hostile cosmic principle inimical to the divine principle of rationality. Nevertheless, the world (Horos) that results from the interaction of form (Osiris) and irrational matter (Isis) remains a fit image of the intelligible world. A proactive cause of evil (Seth-Typhon) is there, but can never overcome the logos (Osiris). According to the analysis of Dillon, Plutarch as well as Atticus derived these sources of irrationality from a conflation of Plato's introduction of an irrational soul in the tenth book of the *Laws*, the pre-cosmic chaos of the second part of the *Timaeus*, and the characteristics of necessity and disorder associated with the receptacle of becoming in the third part of the *Timaeus*.

H. Atticus and Apuleius

Apuleius and Atticus, on the other hand, combine Mind and soul into a single entity. For Apuleius, the cosmic soul is, like Plato's demiurge, a mind, and is the source of all other souls. In his cataloguing of the various types of daemons, Apuleius applies the term daimon to the human soul, to both good (*lares*) and bad (*larvae*) disembodied souls (as does Plutarch, *De defectu oraculi* 416D ff.) and guardian daemons who never enter into bodies. Also in the thought of Atticus, one finds another instance of a lower, evil cosmic soul apparently derived from the disharmonious and disorderly stuff of *Timaeus* 30A and the irrational soul of *Laws* X 896E. On analogy with Plutarch's Isis figure, it is brought to order as a lower, irrational yet "prudent" world soul distinct from a higher, rational world soul.[35]

I. Alcinous/Albinus

The *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous, often ascribed to the Athenian student of Gaius named Albinus, contains teachings on the cosmic and human

34. Daemons are in general purified souls that give help to the living.

35. Atticus (frgs. 3 and 23 des Places; Proclus, *In Timaeum* III.381,26-382,12 Diehl), another exponent of the conflict dualism of *Laws* 10 applied to the explanation of the *Timaeus*, does not separate the evil soul from matter as sharply as Plutarch; evil in the world is explained by the continuing irrational turbulence caused by the presence of an independent, pre-existent evil soul.

soul rather like those of Plutarch and his supposed contemporary, Apuleius. This work makes a clear distinction between a cosmic soul and a cosmic mind. God, conceived as a transcendent Mind, is said to rouse the cosmic soul from a deep slumber and cause it to turn its own *Mind* (νοῦς) to him, in which act it looks upon and strives toward the intelligibles comprising God's mind and so receives the Forms and shapes.[36] As for the human soul, Alcinous adopts Plato's tripartitioning of the soul into the reasonable, spirited and appetitive parts, which he calls cognitive, dispositional and appropriative (γνωστικόν, παραστατικόν and οἰκειωτικόν), which are often at variance with each other, and he also accepts the arguments for the immortality of the rational soul as given by Plato in the *Phaedo*.

Concerning the figure of Albinus, we have the testimony of Proclus (*In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, III.234,8-18), that he too affirmed the immortality of the rational soul, but denies the immortality of irrational souls as well as of the pneumatic envelope or "vehicle" (ὄχημα) of the soul which might be subject to passions or the needs of the body. The soul descends into the body when the embryo is formed, and can pass through many incarnations, both human and animal, for four basic reasons: 1) to maintain a constant number of souls; 2) to satisfy the will of the gods; 3) because of the errant judgment of a free will (ἀκολασία) and 4) for love of the body for which it has a natural affinity as fire does with asphalt.[37]

J. Moderatus

As shown in Chapter 9, the system of Moderatus (Simplicius, *in Phys.* 9.230,34-231,27) elaborates that of Eudorus of Alexandria and anticipates that of Plotinus, and also closely resembles that of Speusippus.[38] In this scheme, a material principle exists at every level except

36. See *Didaskalikos* X.3.12-18 and XIV.3.4-9. See the commentaries of J. M. DILLON (*Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* [Clarendon Later Ancient Philosophers; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993]) and J. WHITTAKER (*Alcinoos: Enseignement des doctrines de Platon*, introduction, texte établi et commenté par J. Whittaker et traduit par P. Louis [Collection des universités de France; Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990]).

37. For discussion, see J. DILLON, "The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory," in *Rediscovery*, 2.357-364.

38. Though explicitly present at the second and lowest ontological levels, there seems to be a feminine material principle implicitly present at every level of his

that of the first One; at the third level, that of the rational soul, which Moderatus characterizes as Number, matter is impressed with shape and numerical proportion to produce objects of the subjacent sensible realm. Nature, as irrational soul, is merely a reflection of the rational cosmic soul or "third one" in the realm of matter. The essence of the immortal rational soul is mathematical, a number containing proportions (octave, fourth, fifth) which "renders symmetrical and agreeable things that differ in any respect" (Iamblichus, *De Anima* in Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.32,50-54).

K. Nicomachus

According to <Iamblichus>, *Theology of Arithmetic* 45,8-50,8 (a passage Dillon takes to be Nicomachean),[39] Nicomachus conceived the world soul as the Hexad, which receives forms from the logos and, as a kind of harmony and number in the form of the basic triangles described in the *Timaeus*, projects them upon matter. As ἑκατεβελέτις ("missle-hurler," an attribute of Apollo here applied to Hecate; 49,12-17), the soul is a "projection of Hecate," who is the Triad, suggesting something like a Logos and a derivative cosmic soul, or perhaps two aspects of the world soul as in Moderatus.

L. Numenius

In his work *On the Good*, Numenius conceives a transcendent world consisting of three Gods or Minds. According to fragment 13 (des Places) of this work, the first god "who is" sows the seed of every soul in all the beings that participate in him while the second god, as Legislator, plants (in first birth) and transplants (in the reincarnation of souls not yet purified) into human bodies the seed sown by the first god. While most Platonists held the world soul to be in some sense divine, Numenius sees it as a god, and unlike most Platonists, such as Plotinus,

metaphysics except the highest, which has no equivalent in Speusippus. The third or psychic level contains the ideal numbers or mathematicals generated from the interaction of the principles of unity and of sheer Quantity at the second level; like Xenocrates, Moderatus called these number, a "collection of monads" (*apud* Iamblichus in Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I, p. 8,1-9,9, 1.364 [Wachsmuth], cited in Chapter 9, p. 367).

39. DILLON, *The Middle Platonists*, 358-359.

who held the descent of the soul as necessary to the completion of the natural world, Numenius held this descent to be an unmitigated evil.

At the level of the world soul, Numenius (frg. 52 des Places) sees two souls, the one beneficent and the other evil. The evil soul is derived from *Laws* X 896D. Unlike his predecessors, Numenius identifies the evil soul with matter since, according to the *Timaeus* (30A; cf. 52D), matter has an inherent motion, and therefore must be moved by soul, and such a soul must be irrational.[40] Soul is never mentioned as a third principle beside god and matter and thus matter is regarded as an active principle (frg. 34 and 52). Matter is called the Dyad (δυάς = *duitas*; frgs. 11 and 52). This Dyad is mother of bodies and of the indigenous gods (frg. 52). Plutarch too combines features of matter and irrational soul in the figure of Isis, but his Isis is eagerly receptive of the good, and is not evil. For Numenius, the opposing functions of a single cosmic soul arise directly from the highest principles, God and Matter (ἕν and δυάς, or *deus* and *silva*), just as for Plutarch both the rational and affective souls arise from the Monad (ἀμέριστος) and Indefinite Dyad (μεριστὴ οὐσία). Numenius is thus one of the first instances of the influence of Plutarch's interpretation of the *Timaeus*.[41]

On the matter of the composition of the human soul, Numenius avoids the more traditional Platonic partitioning of the soul into two or three parts. Instead, according to a few testimonia, he spoke only of a single, seamless soul (e.g. frg. 41), while according to a number of others, he spoke of two souls, rational and irrational, at war with one another

40. Frgs. 13, 52 des Places; compare with Plutarch and Atticus, *apud* Proclus *In Tim.* I.381,26 ff. and Galen, *In Tim. comm.* frg. 2,53-76.

41. On the metaphysics of Numenius, see Chapter 9. Matter and Soul (ὕλη and *anima*) seem to be aspects or expressions of a single principle (a material principle and life or motion principle). Frg. 52 mentions two parts of the soul, such that the evil soul is linked to matter as its author, while that of the rational soul is God. In frg. 43, matter is the cause of evil in the soul, which "grows onto the soul from without," (cf. *Timaeus* 42C, 69C). According to Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* XVI, "the passions are sprouted as mortal things from the body, first perceptions, then pleasure and grief, fear and anger." In *Timaeus* 42A, 43A, the passions arise at the incarnation of the soul into bodies, which are compared to a flowing torrent caused by nourishment, and the changing of the elements in the act of perception. Numenius (frg. 39) interprets the *Timaeus* in terms of the two opposed principles of the Old Academy: the Indefinite Dyad is the μεριστὴ οὐσία, source of the irrational soul (*anima patibilis*) and the Monad is the ἀμέριστος οὐσία, source of the *anima rationalibus*, another notion rather close to those of Plutarch.

(frgs. 43, 44, 52).[42] Souls are immortal and separable from the body (frg. 46). On the debate concerning the immortality of both the rational and irrational aspects of the soul, Numenius follows Speusippus and Xenocrates in claiming immortality only for the rational soul, unlike Plutarch, who allows immortality also for the irrational soul.

According to Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream Vision of Scipio* (I.12.4), which likely stem from Numenius (test. 47 Leemans = frg. 34 des Places [in part]), the soul descends into the world through one of the two gates of heaven (modeled on the two gates of Homer's cave of the Nymphs and Plato's myth of Er), located at the sign of Cancer (the gate of humans), and, if it achieves immortality after the death of the body, it reascends through the gate at the sign of Capricorn (the gate of the gods). At the point in its descent where it reaches the interface between the Zodiac and the Milky Way, the soul loses its original and indivisible spherical form and takes on that of a cone, much as a line is derived from a point, moving from indivisibility to divisibility; originating from the Monad with a spherical shape, it becomes dyadic, the shape of a cone being the simplest two-surfaced figure after the single-surfaced sphere.

In the course of its descent, the soul acquires in each successive planetary sphere a new faculty (δύναμις).[43] Finally on earth, the soul is

42. Probably based on the good and evil souls of *Laws* X 896DE and the ever-begetting and life-producing (ἀϊγενῆς & ζωογενῆς) principles in *Statesman* 309C. ARMSTRONG ("Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," in B. Aland, ed., *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978], 106-109) thinks that Numenius' doctrine of an evil soul in matter is not due to Gnostic influence, and that his doctrine of two souls in man, rational and irrational, may owe more to the Judaism of Qumran than to Gnosticism (frg. 52, 48, 44 = test. 30, 40, 36; *Community Rule* 1QS III-IV). More than Plutarch he affirms evil in the heavens (frg. 52), which he deduces from the material character of the heavenly bodies. Embodiment for man is always an evil and escape from the body is possible and desirable, as Plato and Empedocles in fact argued.

43. See J. FLAMANT, "Éléments gnostiques dans l'œuvre de Macrobe," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, ed. R. Van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 91; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 131-142. The soul's original descent into the body is a progressive incorporation: it receives its rational powers from Saturn, its active powers from Jupiter, its spirited powers from Mars, its perceptive powers from the Sun, its appetitive powers from Venus, its linguistic powers from Mercury, and its power of growth from the Moon (note the interleaving of the three Platonic and three Aristotelian parts of the soul).

incarnated into a material body. This notion is found not only in Macrobius, but also elsewhere, with the accretion of both positive virtues, as in Numenius, and negative virtues, as in the *Poimandres*.[44] It is likely that the positive interpretation may have originated with Numenius; to a Neopythagorean Platonist, the heavens are beautiful and harmonious and the divine stars could never be evil, even though he seems to accept a dualistic partition of the cosmos beginning at the level of the planets. Nevertheless, the embodiment of the soul is for Numenius (as well as Cronius and Harpocration) always an evil.[45]

M. The *Chaldaean Oracles*

The *Chaldaean Oracles*, roughly contemporary with Numenius, identify Hecate as the source of the cosmic soul.[46] On a higher level, she is receptive of the supreme God's emanations and on a lower level is in turn the source of the processions towards the sensible realm; she is the principle that separates the highest being from the sensible realm, as well as the bond that links them.[47]

Individual human souls are regarded as fallen from the divine realm and incarnated into bodies to which they have become slaves (frgs. 115, 143 des Places). Nevertheless, one's intellect is able to direct the soul to the intelligible realm, where it abandons its forgetfulness (frgs. 97, 109, 171), escapes the fated herd of human bodies dwelling in the dark, unformed abyss of the physical cosmos (frgs. 158, 163, 164) and sheds the material envelopes (πνεύματα, ὀχήματα, frgs. 104, 120, 123) it received at its descent into the world in exchange for an inert, invisible body (δέμας) devoid of breath (frg. 163). In this vein, the *Oracles* display a severe contempt for the body.

44. E.g. in Macrobius, *In somnium Scipionis* I.12.13, the Hermetic *Poimandres* (1,24-26), Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (I.148,1-6 & III.355,12-15), and in Servius' *Commentary on the Aeneid* (VI.127 the sun and moon excluded). While according to Macrobius and Proclus, the accreted powers (theoretical, political, spirited, linguistic, appetitive, perceptive, nutritive) are mostly positive, in Servius (torpor, desire for absolute power, anger, passion and greed), and in the Poimandres (falsehood, unlimited appetite, presumptuous audacity, arrogance, appetitive guile, evil devices and the power of growth and diminution, abandoned in reverse upon on the soul's reascent), they are all vices.

45. According to Iamblichus *apud* Stobaeus *Anthologium* 1.49.40.

46. On the metaphysics of the *Oracles*, see Chapter 9.

47. Exactly as in the case of the Sethian Barbelo and the Valentinian Sophia Achamoth. In the *Oracles*, Hecate is variously equated with the source of the world soul, suggesting that, much like the relationship between Barbelo and Sophia in Sethian theology, she was understood by the Chaldaeans as being the transcendent aspect of the world soul who generates the immanent world soul, from which in turn was derived the world of Nature. Cf. the presentation of J. DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, 392-396.

N. Plotinus

The metaphysics of Plotinus features the cosmic soul as one of the three principle hypostases of his system, the One, the Intellect, and the Soul. In a monistic system such as that of Plotinus, one of the key questions is why there should be anything at all besides the supreme One, who represents sheer Unity with no trace of multiplicity at all, which is the property of the lower hypostases, particularly of the cosmic soul. With no effort or intentionality on the part of the One, the divine Intellect is the result of a spontaneous irradiation or emanation of the inherent vitality of its source. In fact Plotinus recognizes something "forward" or initiatory in even this spontaneous emanation, but the matter becomes more acute in the case of the emanation of the Soul, which, in contrast with the Intellect, is a principle of change and movement completely foreign to the One. The problem for a Platonist was to reconcile the *Phaedrus*' view of the soul's descent as a result of a primal sin with the *Timaeus*' declaration that it is here on a divine mission. In general, Plotinus accounts for the soul's descent into a body as a biological necessity arising out of the Universal Logos, to the effect that the cosmos, like any physical body, must be governed by a law that causes the body to develop the appropriate organs at the appropriate time. The soul's descent into the body is an automatic result of this natural law, and its governance of the body is part of the divine administration of the world. Nevertheless, especially in the case of human souls, Plotinus' earliest recorded view (*Ennead* I, 6 [1]) is that the soul is in this world as a stranger clothed in ugly and alien garments, and must seek her return to her homeland where her father lives (I, 6.8,16-21); to find this homeland is for the soul to turn inward and find itself (I, 6.5,53; 6.8,4; 6.9,21-22). In various ways, Plotinus sought an explanation for the origin of this situation.

In the case of the cosmic soul, even though its descent is not the result of external compulsion, neither is it a consciously voluntary one. The problem is that the soul's descent is instinctive, like the sexual urge, due

to a willful assertion of its own identity ("to belong to itself"), or a narcissistic falling in love with its image, the terrestrial body, or a Pythagorean "audacity" (τόλμα) causing a being that potentially contains the whole of reality to choose instead to attach itself to only a small part of it, the body.[48] According to A. H. Armstrong, in the late treatise *Ennead* I, 1 [53], Plotinus tries to soften this notion by suggesting that the hypostasis of soul doesn't descend at all: instead, this greatest of individual souls merely lets a dianoetic power or logos of itself descend to the discursive level, thus generating the temporal world. It is a necessary and good descent, since some kind of soul-movement must precede body-movement, in accord with the teaching of Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Laws*.[49]

48. Plotinus accounts for the descent of the cosmic soul from its original residence within eternally stable Intellect by suggesting that a part or "power" of the cosmic soul has an independent nature, wanting to be on its own by having its mental objects in succession rather than all at once as in Intellect, and turns from noetic rest to the successional activity of discursive reasoning, and so exposes and enslaves itself and its product, the material world, to time and temporality. The cosmic soul does not really fall, but merely projects an image of itself there; it is only a part of it that descends.

49. A. H. ARMSTRONG, "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 109-124, makes clear that there is both a good and a bad aspect in the origin and descent of the cosmic soul. The bad aspect is for many scholars symbolized by Plotinus' use of the concept of audacity to characterize the intentional aspect of the soul's descent. H. JONAS lays much weight on this term in his attempt to stress the gnostic character of Plotinus' doctrine of the descent of the soul ("The Soul in Gnosticism and Platonism," *Philosophical Essays, From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1974], 324-334). As Armstrong explains, the term τόλμα, audacity, as applied to the descent of his second and third principles (Nous: VI, 9.5,24-29; III, 8.8,30-39; Cosmic soul: III, 7.11 and V, 2.1-4 and individual souls V, 1.1-5), was the name given by Neopythagoreans to the Dyad, the principle of multiplicity necessary to any world, and ultimately of evil, which they usually considered to have been produced by the primal Monad (cf. Alexander Polyhistor and Moderatus, whose primal One, the Unitary Logos, by self-privation makes room for indefinite formless quantity, the dyadic cause of evil). In this case, the τόλμα, audacity, separating the dyad from the One is initiated from the One himself in order to make room for the universe. For Plotinus there is no self-privation, but only an overflowing of infinite power; thus τόλμα originates with the One or Good itself, and so cannot be evil. This unformed life comes forth from its source voluntarily, but since nothing other than the One can exist if the descent into limitless multiplicity continues unchecked, it must turn back upon its source, an act coinciding with a contemplative reversion upon itself in which this unformed life "shapes itself."

In the case also of the descent of human souls, Plotinus can combine these two reactions to the necessary descent of souls, as in *Ennead* IV, 8 [6], *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies*.[50] The higher individual soul permanently inhabits the world of Intellect; it is only its logos which enters into the composite of soul and body, an event which can be described as audacious (τόλμα) downwards inclination (νεῦσις), sinning by moving deeper than it needs to into the material world in self-forgetful self-centeredness, and suffering the consequences. Plotinus tries to soften this picture by saying that the descent was ordained by a god, that some means had to be found to manifest the soul's power and very existence, and that exposure to evil was necessary for a clearer knowledge of the good (*Ennead* IV, 8.5-7). Unfortunately, such solutions to the problem of the descent of either the cosmic or the individual soul do not really work, since they fail to explain why our souls erroneously identify themselves with this descended image or logos of themselves and need to be purified of its influence. The later Neoplatonists do not follow Plotinus in the notion that our higher souls do not descend, yet the descent is viewed as basically positive, as can be seen in Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus* (III.277.31-279.2 Diehl), which rests mostly on the teaching of Iamblichus and which presents a positive view of the descent; Platonism renounces world-alienation from the third century onwards.

becoming the best thing possible, Intellect. But even this contemplative return must be also checked if anything other than the Good is to exist at all. It is this checked return, a "standing away," a separation leaving Intellect as near the One as possible with separate existence which is the primary τόλμα, and upon which all subsequent τόλμα depends.

50. As ARMSTRONG explains ("Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," 109-124), beginning with an account of Plotinus' personal experience and containing a collection of the most dualistic passages he could find in the tradition, *Ennead* IV, 8 paints a gloomy picture, but concludes with cheerfulness about the cosmos and our position within it—in fact, our higher selves do not descend at all, but remain in the intelligible world. Embodiment is a good and necessary part of the self-diffusion of the Good through the universe to the last and lowest limits of possible existence. The logos of man in the intelligible world must include his body as well as his soul, contrary to the Platonic commonplace that the man is his soul.

II. The Knowledge of God in Platonism

Some years ago, the classicist E. Havelock argued that Plato's philosophy was an attempt to articulate the conceptual vocabulary and educational apparatus appropriate to an interiorized literacy, which he attempted to implement by an attack on the ancient poets.[51] The poetic world attacked by Plato was the active, personal, concrete, formulaic, participatory life-world of orality, while Plato championed the more static, impersonal, abstract, analytic, detached world of literacy. Poetry was the fundamental educational medium for early Greek culture; most if not all knowledge was remembered in poetic form. Havelock argues that Plato needed to develop a vocabulary of formal abstraction to replace the concrete event- or action-oriented vocabulary of the old oral culture. He therefore elucidated entities that are incorporeal and timeless, that could be generalized across contexts and would not be tied to particular times and places as the units of Homeric discourse apparently are. From this arose the Forms. In his attempt to explain the Forms, Plato relied on language that has strong visual—that is, spatial—connotations. At the highest intelligible level, the Form, e.g., of bed undeniably suggests visual relationships—such as the ideal geometry of a bed—while, as one proceeds down the scale of intellection, one eventually arrives at the poet's imperfect visualization, based on mere conjecture or opinion. Building on the historical Parmenides' equation between that-which-is and that-which-can-be-thought (τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι, frg. 3 [Diels-Kranz] = Plotinus, *Ennead* V, 1 [10] 8,17), Plato and his successors saw the human soul and its intellect as that part of the physical realm that was most in touch with ultimate reality, and the method of dialectical reasoning as the only way to know it and render a true account of it. And as the passage previously cited from the *Cratylus* (439B6-8): "But we may admit so much, that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names; rather they must be studied and investigated in themselves (αὐτὰ ἐξ' αὑτῶν)" suggests, the success of dialectic rested mostly on the faculty of vision, of Theoria.

51. E. A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 254-271.

A. Plato's Epistemology

In the divided line simile of *Republic* VI 511A-E, Plato specified two forms of knowledge, opinion (δόξα) and science (ἐπιστήμη), of which opinion is further divided into imagination (εἰκασία) and belief (πίστις) and science into mediated knowledge (διάνοια) and pure intellection (νόησις).[52] These four kinds are distinguished by reference to their respective objects of focus: shadows and images of sensible things, the sensible objects themselves, recognition of Forms through sensible particulars and hypothetical deduction, and lastly the direct apprehension or intuition of the Forms, supreme principles, and their interrelations, an activity known as dialectic.

> [511a] "This then is the class (εἶδος) that I (Socrates) described as intelligible (νοητόν), it is true, but with the reservation first that the soul is compelled to employ assumptions in the investigation of it, not proceeding to a first principle because of its inability to extricate itself from and rise above its assumptions (ὑποθέσεων), and second, that it uses as images or likenesses the very objects that are themselves copied and adumbrated (ἀπεικασθεῖσιν) by the class below them, and that in comparison with these latter are esteemed as clear and held in honor." "I understand," [511b] said he (Glaucon), "that you are speaking of what falls under geometry and the kindred arts." "Understand then," said I, "that by the other section of the intelligible I mean that which the reason (λόγος) itself lays hold of by the power of dialectics (διαλέγεσθαι), treating its assumptions (ὑποθέσεις) not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypotheses, underpinnings, footings, and springboards (ἐπιβάσεις τε καὶ ὁρμάς) so to speak, to enable it to rise to that which requires no assumption and is the starting-point of all (τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχήν), and after attaining to that again taking hold of the first dependencies from it, so to proceed downward to the conclusion, [511c] making no use whatever of any object of sense but only of pure ideas moving on through ideas to ideas and ending with ideas." "I understand," he said; "not fully, for it is no slight task that you appear to have in mind, but I do understand that you mean to distinguish the aspect of reality and the intelligible (διαλέγεσθαι ἐπιστήμης τοῦ ὄντος τε καὶ νοητοῦ θεωρούμενον), which is contemplated by the power of dialectic, as something truer and more exact than the object of the so-called arts and sciences whose assumptions are arbitrary starting-points. And though it is true that those who contemplate (θεᾶσθαι) them are com-

52. According to Aristotle (*De anima* I 2,404b16 ff.; cf. Plato, *Laws* 894a), in the soul the four primary numbers become the geometrical entities point, line, plane and solid, corresponding to the four modes of cognition, intuitive knowledge (νόησις), discursive knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), opinion (δόξα), and perception (αἴσθησις).

> pelled to use their understanding (διανοίᾳ) and not [511d] their senses, yet, because they do not go back to the beginning in the study of them but start from assumptions, you do not think they possess true intelligence (νοῦν) about them although the things themselves are intelligibles when apprehended in conjunction with a first principle. And I think you call the mental habit of geometers and their like mind or understanding (διάνοιαν) and not reason (νοῦν) because you regard understanding (διάνοιαν) as something intermediate between opinion and reason (δόξης τε καὶ νοῦ)." "Your interpretation is quite sufficient," I said; "and now, answering to these four sections, assume these four affections occurring in the soul: intellection (νόησιν) or reason for the highest, [511e] understanding (διάνοιαν) for the second; assign belief (πίστιν) to the third, and to the last picture-thinking or conjecture (εἰκασίαν), and arrange them in a proportion, considering that they participate in clearness and precision in the same degree as their objects partake of truth and reality." (*Republic* VII 511A-E [Shorey])

Dialectic transcends the senses and the sensibles for direct apprehension of the ideas. In *Phaedrus* 265D-266C, Plato, distinguishes two kinds of dialectic, an ascending or "synoptic" (*Republic* VII 537C) dialectic that moves (by recollection) from idea to idea to the supreme idea, and a descending, "diairetic" dialectic that moves from the highest idea and by division distinguishes within the general ideas particular ideas until one reaches ideas that do not include in themselves further ideas. One thus moves from multiplicity to unity and from unity to its expressed multiplicity.

> [265D] "In these chance utterances there were involved two principles, the essence of which it would be gratifying to learn, if art could teach it." [Phaedrus:] "What principles?" [Socrates:] "That of perceiving and bringing together in one idea (εἰς μίαν τε ἰδέαν συνορῶντα) the scattered particulars, that one may make clear by definition the particular thing which he wishes to explain; just as now, in speaking of Love, we said what he is and defined it, whether well or ill. Certainly by this means the discourse acquired clearness and consistency." [Phaedrus:] "And what is the other principle, Socrates?" [265E] [Socrates:] "That of dividing things again by classes, where the natural joints are (διατέμνειν κατ' ἄρθρα ᾗ πέφυκεν), and not trying to break any part, after the manner of a bad carver.... [266B] Now I myself, Phaedrus, am a lover of these processes of division and bringing together (διαιρέσεων καὶ συναγαγῶν), as aids to speech and thought; and if I think any other man is able to see things that can naturally be collected into one and divided into many, him I follow after and walk in his footsteps as if he were a god. And whether the name I give to those who can do this is right or wrong, God knows, [266C] but I have called them hitherto dialecticians (διαλεκτικούς)." (*Phaedrus* 265D3-266C1 [Fowler])

The same dialectical procedure is further described in the *Sophist*:

> Stranger: Shall we not say that the division (διαιρεῖσθαι) of things by classes and the avoidance of the belief that the same class is another, or another the same, belongs to the science of dialectic (διαλεκτικῆς ... ἐπιστήμης)? Theaetetus: Yes, we shall. Stranger: Then, surely, he who can divide rightly is able to see clearly 1) one form pervading a discrete multitude, and 2) many different forms contained from without by one higher form; and again, 3) one form unified into a single whole and pervading many such wholes, and 4) many forms, existing only in separation and isolation. This is the knowledge and ability to distinguish (διακρίνειν κατὰ γένος ἐπίστασθαι) by classes how individual things can or cannot be associated with one another. Theaetetus: Certainly it is. Stranger: But you surely, I suppose, will not grant the art of dialectic to any but the man who pursues philosophy in purity and righteousness. Theaetetus: How could it be granted to anyone else? Stranger: Then it is in some region like this that we shall always, both now and hereafter, discover the philosopher, if we look for him. (*Sophist* 253DE)

Along similar lines, in the *Seventh Letter* (341B-344D) Plato—or a close disciple—denies that the knowledge of ultimate truth can be grasped by discursive reasoning, which expresses itself in words, whether spoken or written. Such reasoning cannot penetrate to the essence of things, which is the purview of intuitive vision alone:[53]

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53. According to R. T. WALLIS, this truth "arises, we are told, only after long philosophical communion concerning the subject, when a light suddenly springs up in the soul and thereafter nourishes itself (*Letter* VII 341c: ῥητὸν γὰρ οὐδαμῶς ἐστιν ὡς ἄλλα μαθήματα, ἀλλ' ἐκ πολλῆς συνουσίας γιγνομένης περὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτὸ καὶ τοῦ συζῆν ἐξαίφνης, οἷον ἀπὸ πυρὸς πηδήσαντος ἐξαφθὲν φῶς, ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ φενόμενον αὐτὸ ἤδη τρέφει). The reason, we subsequently learn, is the inadequacy of the 'four,' names (ὀνόματα), definitions (λόγοι), sensible images (εἴδωλα), and human knowledge based on these, to express the nature of 'the Fifth,' i.e., the Pure Form (342a ff.). It is, of course, fundamental to Platonism that sensible images are only inferior imitations of the forms. Similarly names are not fixed to objects by nature nor are definitions, since they are composed of nouns (ὀνόματα) and verbs (ῥήματα). Hence all four are defective in that they express only a thing's quality (τὸ ποῖόν τι) instead of its essence (τὸ τί) (342e-343c). But it is only by grasping these four that one can subsequently attain knowledge of the Fifth. It is by passing through the four, 'ascending and descending to each in turn,' that true knowledge can be generated with difficulty in the souls of intellectually and morally suitable pupils" ("ΝΟΥΣ as Experience," *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. B. Harris [Studies

> No one, if he has not somehow or other got hold of the four things first mentioned (name [ὄνομα], definition [λόγος], image [εἴδωλον], knowledge [ἐπιστήμη]), can ever be completely a partaker of knowledge of the fifth (οὐ γὰρ ἄν τούτων μή τις τὰ τέτταρα λάβῃ ἁμῶς γέ πως, οὔποτε τελέως ἐπιστήμης τοῦ πέμπτου μέτοχος ἔσται). Further, on account of the weakness of language, these (i.e., the four) attempt to show what each thing is like, not less than what each thing is (τὸ ποῖόν τι περὶ ἕκαστον δηλοῦν ἢ ἑκάστου διὰ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές). [343a] For this reason no man of intelligence will venture to express his philosophical views in language, especially not in language that is unchangeable, which is true of that which is set down in written characters. (Plato, *Letter* 7 342E-343A [Harward]).

For Plato, intellection (νόησις) is a kind of thinking relating to Forms alone and understanding (διάνοια) is a kind of thinking that generalizes from particulars to Forms (roughly like Aristotle's discursive reasoning from premises to conclusion). They are both performed by a single part of the soul and differ merely in their relation to their respective objects of cognition. But after Plato, these two forms of thinking will come to be referred to separate organs of thought.

B. The Stoics

The Stoics, although they rejected Plato's Forms and his distinctions between levels of reality, nevertheless continued Plato's emphasis on direct perception even though its object was to be sensible rather than ideal realities. The truth of a cataleptic presentation is based on a corporeal modification that things produce in our souls. Only qualities, not the essences of things can be grasped. Stoic epistemology incorporated both Heraclitus' (e.g., frg. 50 Diels-Kranz) assumption that it is one and the same λόγος that determines both the patterns of thought and the structure of reality, and Plato's suggestion in the *Cratylus* (425D1-4) that "primal" names (i.e., non-compound nouns) function to represent things in language. Yet Chrysippus drew attention to "anomaly," the fact that two unlike words can have the same sense and similar words can be used with unlike senses (SVF 2.151 von Arnim): it therefore follows that we cannot establish what someone is saying merely by analyzing the linguistic components of his utterance. There is a distinction between someone's thought or intended meaning and the statement that a listener may take him to be meaning. There is a difference between

in Neoplatonism Ancient and Modern I; Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1976], 128-129).

names—which refer to bodies—and statements (λέκτα), meanings, and concepts (ἐννοήματα), which are incorporeal and can be either true or false. Correspondingly, there are two kinds of Logos (Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos* VIII.275.5-8): an internal reason (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) unique to humans, and an uttered or expressed reason (λόγος προφορικός) common not only to humans but also to irrational animals.

C. The Middle Platonists

Platonists steeped in Stoicism like Philo of Alexandria immediately related such a distinction to that between the intelligible and perceptible world; as the silent internal reason (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) is to the expressed or uttered reason (λόγος προφορικός) in humans, so are the intelligible paradigmatic ideas to their sensible images in the perceptible realm:

> For the Logos in both humans and in the universe is double: With the universe, in one form it has to do with the incorporeals and paradigmatic ideas from which the intelligible world was framed and in the other with visible things that are imitations and representations of those ideas from which this perceptible cosmos is produced. With humans, in one form it is internal, in the other it is uttered; the former is like some stream from which the latter flows resonantly; the inward is located in the governing part of the soul, and the outward in the tongue and mouth and all the other organs of speech during utterance. (Philo of Alexandria, *De Vita Mosis* 2.127)

Clearly theories of this sort have influenced the progressively articulate Thought, Voice, Speech, and Logos modalities of the revealer's self-manifestation in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* discussed in previous chapters. Later on, Plotinus too applied the same distinction directly to the generation of Soul as the expressed or discursive thought of Intellect:

> [The soul] is a certain image of Intellect; just as a thought in its utterance (λόγος προφορικός) is an image of the thought in the soul (λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), so soul is itself the expressed thought of Intellect, and its whole activity, and the life which it sends forth for the establishment of another reality. (*Ennead* V, 1 [10] 3.7-10 [Armstrong])

In Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism, intellection and discursive reasoning are generally referred to separate levels of a divine Intellect just as they are to separate faculties of the human soul. Intellect is generally

upward directed and aloof from what is below it, while discursive reason characterizes the downward directed activity of the demiurge.

Amelius, a member of Plotinus' circle, distinguished between the solely intellectual and actively productive functions of the demiurge considered as a divine mind:

> Amelius remarkably extends Plato by recognizing the various demiurgic causes continually jumping from one to another in a noiseless course, demonstrating nothing about the continuity of the divine causes themselves, but as if arranged around one and the same being through a mutual union of demiurges. For all are one and one are all, since now one plans, another reasons, another operates on (the world), and one makes solely by intention, one by intellection and the fact of thinking, and one by craftsmanship, for he places intellect in soul and soul in body and thus the all is fashioned. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*, I.398,16-26)

Even earlier, Numenius conceived these distinct functions of the divine mind as distributed among two or three gods:

> The First God, who exists in himself, is simple; for as he absolutely deals with none but himself, he is in no way divisible. The Second and Third God are One, but when brought together with Matter, which is dyadic, on the one hand he unites it, on the other hand he is split by it, because of its fluid and seductive character. But by not being oriented toward the Intelligible, that is to his own nature, he forgets himself, while he gazes on Matter and is concerned with it. He comes into contact with the Perceptible, and busies Himself with it and, although moved by desires for Matter, he elevates it into his own nature. (Numenius, frg. 16, Des Places)

In *Ennead* III, 9 [13], Plotinus toyed with the idea that one might interpret Plato's doctrine of the demiurgic Intellect in *Timaeus* 39e by distinguishing between an Intellect in repose, an active Intellect which contemplates the first, and perhaps a planning or discursive Intellect (νοῦς μερίσας) which divides universal ideas into particular ideas.

> There is nothing against [this solution]; the intelligible object is also an intellect at rest and in unity and quietness, but the nature of the intellect which sees that intellect which remains within itself is an activity proceeding from it, which sees that [static] intellect; and by seeing that intellect it is in a way the intellect of that intellect, because it thinks it; but that thinking intellect itself too is intelligent subject and intelligible object in a different way, by imitation. This, then, is that which "planned" to make in this universe the four kinds of living creatures (gods, birds, fish, animals) which it sees in the intelligible. Plato seems, nevertheless, to be making, obscurely, the intending principle to be other than those two. But to others it will seem that the three are one, the living creature which exists in itself, the intellect, and the planning principle. (*Ennead* III, 9 [13] 1.15-25 [Armstrong])

As we shall see in Chapter 12, the Platonizing Sethian treatises likewise distinguish three levels of the Barbelo Aeon, the Sethian equivalent of the divine Intellect: Kalyptos is the domain of the archetypes, Protophanes contemplates the archetypes and conveys them to Autogenes, who apprehends them discursively and applies them individually and successively to shape the realm of nature.

D. Plotinus

In Plotinus, intellection and discursive reasoning are referred to their own separate faculties, Intellect and Soul. For him, reason deals with its objects piecemeal, moving from one discrete object to the next, or from premises and hypotheses to conclusions, while Intellect goes beyond reason by seeing its objects all at once and as a whole (rather after the fashion of Plato's "synoptic" dialectic):

> [Dialectic] uses Plato's method of division to distinguish the Forms, and to determine the essential nature of each thing, and to find the primary kinds, and weaving together by the intellect all that issues from these primary kinds, till it has traversed the whole intelligible world; then it resolves again the structure of that world into its parts, and comes back to its starting-point; and then, keeping quiet (for it is quiet in so far as it is present There) it busies itself no more, but contemplates, having arrived at unity. It leaves what is called logical activity, about propositions and syllogisms, to another art, as it might leave knowing how to write. Some of the matter of logic it considers necessary, as a preliminary, but it makes itself the judge of this, as of everything else, and considers some of it useful and some superfluous, and belonging to the discipline which wants it. (*Ennead* I, 3 [20] 4,13-24 Armstrong)

He attempts to illustrate this based on his assumption that Egyptian hieroglyphs were ideograms and never represented sounds, thus serving as an example of how intellection does not involve procession from one thing to the next.

> Similarly, as it seems to me, the wise of Egypt—whether in precise knowledge or by a prompting of nature—indicated the truth where, in their effort towards philosophical statement, they left aside the writing-forms that take in the detail of words and sentences—those characters that represent sounds and convey the propositions of reasoning—and drew

> pictures instead, engraving in the temple-inscriptions a separate image for every separate item: thus they exhibited the mode in which the Supreme goes forth. For each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not as aggregate of discursive reasoning and detailed willing. Later from this wisdom in unity there appears, in another form of being, an image, already less compact, which announces the original in an outward stage and seeks the causes by which things are such that the wonder rises how a generated world can be so excellent. (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 6,1-9 Armstrong)

According to Alcinous (*Didaskalikos* IV.7,12-17, interpreting *Timaeus* 28A2), in the human realm, intellection discerns the primary intelligibles with a certain "comprehension" or "embrace" and not in succession (Τὰ μὲν δὲ πρῶτα νοητὰ νόησις κρίνει οὐκ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐπιστημονικοῦ λόγου, περιλήψει τινὶ καὶ οὐ διεξόδῳ). For Plotinus, the life of the Soul and of ourselves is discursive reason; it is a life lived in time; in fact its life *is* time.[54] Rather than the *totum simul* of Intellect's vision, Soul and ensouled human beings must express ideas in language: expression through words entails an "everlasting progression" (*Ennead* III, 7 [45] 13,43-44), both a temporal and a causal sequence (*Ennead* V, 3 [49] 17,12-28):

> The soul runs over all truths, and all the same shuns the truths we know if someone tries to express them in words and discursive thought; for discursive thought (διάνοιαν), in order to express anything in words, has to consider one thing after another (διέξοδος): this is the method of description; but how can one describe the absolutely simple? But it is enough if the intellect comes into contact with it (νοερῶς ἐφάψασθαι); but when it has done so, while the contact lasts, it is absolutely impossible, nor has it time, to speak; but it is afterwards that it is able to reason about it. One must believe one has seen, when the soul suddenly (ἐξαίφνης) takes light. (*Ennead* V, 3 [49] 17,12-28 Armstrong)

54. From a state of stable quietude at rest in Intellect there arises an inquietude, a vital, restless, self-assertive movement towards an existence independent from that of the eternal timelessness of Intellect, a procession that hypostatizes itself, nay "temporalizes (ἐχρόνωσεν) itself" as Soul, supplementing Intellect's simultaneity with successiveness (*Ennead* III, 7 [45] 11,11-40). The life of Soul is time; it is Plato's "moving image of eternity." And insofar as the physical world generated by Soul is in Soul as its prior, it too is "in time." Thus Soul's cognition—Logos—is discursive, extended, "unfolding itself," moving from one idea to another. That is not to say that Soul's reasoning is a mere matter of temporal succession as in a narrative; its "before" and "after" rather signify prior and subsequent in order of importance or causality (*Ennead* IV, 4 [28] 1,26-28).

Therefore, linguistic articulation is at best an inferior imitation of intellection, which is a simultaneous seeing of everything. The object of Intellect is the pure forms, while discursive thought contemplates them only at a distance and can access only images of them in which the forms are merely reflected as in a mirror (*Ennead* I, 4 [46] 10,6-15).[55]

> Perhaps we do not notice it because it is not concerned with any object of sense; for our minds, by means of sense-perception—which is a kind of intermediary when dealing with sensible things—do appear to work on the level of sense and think about sense-objects But why should not intellect itself be active [without perception], and also its attendant soul, which comes before sense-perception and any sort of awareness? There must be an activity prior to awareness if "thinking and being are the same" (Parmenides frg. B3 Diels; Δεῖ γὰρ τὸ πρὸ ἀντιλήψεως ἐνέργημα εἶναι, εἴπερ τὸ αὐτὸ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ εἶναι). It seems as if awareness exists and is produced when intellectual activity is reflexive and when that in the life of the soul which is active in thinking is in a way projected back, as happens with a mirror-reflection (Καὶ ἔοικεν ἡ ἀντίληψις εἶναι καὶ γίνεσθαι ἀνακάμπτοντος τοῦ νοήματος καὶ τοῦ ἐνεργοῦντος τοῦ κατὰ τὸ ζῆν τῆς ψυχῆς οἷον ἀπωσθέντος πάλιν, ὥσπερ ἐν κατόπτρῳ) when there is a smooth, bright, untroubled surface In these circumstances when the mirror is there the mirror-image is produced, but when it is not there or is not in the right state the object of which the image would have been is [all the same] actually there. In the same way as regards the soul, when that kind of thing in us which mirrors the images of thought and intellect is undisturbed, we see them and know them in a way parallel to sense-perception, along with the prior knowledge that it is intellect and thought that are active. (*Ennead* I, 4 [46] 10,6-15 Armstrong)

Discursive reasoning is of use only in this world:

> Does the soul use discursive reasoning (λογισμός) before it comes and again after it goes out of the body? No, discursive reasoning comes into it here below, when it is already in perplexity and full of care, and in a state of greater weakness; for feeling the need of reasoning is a lessening of the intellect in respect of its self-sufficiency (ἐλάττωσις γὰρ νοῦ εἰς αὐτάρκειαν τὸ λογισμοῦ δεῖσθαι).... But one must understand reasoning

55. See R. T. WALLIS, "NOΥΣ as Experience," in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. B. Harris (Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern I; Norfolk, VA: International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, 1976), 121-153, esp. 125-127: in Homer, intellect (νοῦς and related forms) denotes realization of a situation's true meaning; in Plato it enables a direct and more complete insight into truths previously grasped only in the abstract; in Plotinus it provides a vision of the true archetypal reality of which this world constitutes a partial image.

> in this sort of sense; because if one understands reasoning to be the state of mind which exists in them [earthly craftsmen] always proceeding from Intellect, and which is a static activity and a kind of reflection of Intellect, they would employ reasoning in that other world, too. (*Ennead* IV, 3 [27] 18,1-13 [in part] Armstrong)

As a result, speaking, hearing, writing, and all uses of discursive language and thought are only a prelude to intellection and vision:

> Therefore, (Plato, *Letter VII* 341c5) says, "it cannot be spoken or written", but we speak and write by pressing on towards it (the One) and awakening from words (λόγοι) to the vision (θέα) of it, as if showing the way to someone who wants to have a view (θεάσασθαι) of something. For teaching (δίδαξις) goes as far as the road and the traveling, but the vision (θέα) is the task of someone who has already resolved to see (ἰδεῖν).... for that One is not absent from any and yet absent from all, so that in its presence it is not present except to those who are able and prepared to receive it, so as to be in accord with it (ἐναρμόσαι) and as if grasp it and touch it in their likeness (ἐφάψασθαι καὶ θίγειν ὁμοιότητι); and, by the power in oneself akin to that which comes from the One, when someone is as he was when he came from him, he is already able to see insofar as it is the nature of that God to be seen (ὡς πέφυκεν ἐκεῖνος θεατὸς εἶναι). (*Ennead* VI, 9 [9] 4,11-30 Armstrong)

In the visionary ascent scheme of the Platonizing Sethian texts, the vertical hierarchy of levels of intelligible being is all-important, since the Gnostic's assimilation with these levels is a contemplative act of the mind. The progression from Autogenes to Protophanes to Kalyptos is the progression from sequential discursive thought occupied with differentiated particulars (the individuals) to the vision of their undifferentiated unity (those who exist together) to the awareness of pure being in its total unity (the authentic existents). At that point, however, the increasing self-concentration of vision must transcend the realm of determinate being altogether through contemplation of the absolute infinitival being of the Triple Powered One, which leads to the Invisible Spirit beyond being altogether. Intellection itself only suffices to know determinate reality; to know indeterminate reality requires the suspension of all cognitive activity. At this point all discursive reasoning and intellection is abandoned; knowing gives way to unknowing, to learned ignorance, a flash of insight or revelation.

E. The Classical "Paths" to the Knowledge of God

In the first four centuries of our era to which the Barbeloite treatises belong, the Platonic tradition regarded metaphysics or theology as the highest of the three stages of enlightenment or spiritual progress.[56] It corresponded to the highest stage of initiation into the mysteries and was in fact called ἐποπτεία, the supreme vision of the highest reality, tantamount to assimilating oneself to God insofar as possible (*Theaetetus* 176B).[57] This traditional Platonic quest is found not only in Plato,

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56. Plato's successors such as Xenocrates and Aristotle also maintained a threefold approach to philosophy, subdividing it into theology, mathematics and physics (Aristotle) or into physics (including the idea theory), ethics, and logic (Xenocrates). The latter became the standard division of subject matter in the Academy as well as within the Peripatetic and Stoic traditions. Even the Epicureans divided philosophy into physics, ethics, and epistemology (τὸ κανονικόν). Since Aristotle, the domain of theoretical philosophy was physics, at whose summit was "first philosophy," called theology or metaphysics, then mathematics, including astronomy, and then physics proper. On this division and its history in western thought, see P. MERLAN, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 3rd edition, 1968), 53-77. Cf. Aristotle, *Met.* VI 1026a 6-19; XI 1064b 1-3; Xenocrates *apud* Sext. Emp. *Adv. Math.* VII, 16,147 (= frgs. 1 and 5 Heinze). Commenting on this phenomenon, P. Hadot points out that Porphyry's systematic arrangement of Plotinus' Enneads conforms to this scheme (*Enn.* I = ethics; *Enn.* II, III = physics; *Enn.* IV, V, VI = epoptic, the objects of contemplation), as do certain Neoplatonic prescriptions for the order of the study of Plato's dialogues (*Republic* = ethics; *Timaeus* = physics; *Parmenides* = theology). See P. HADOT, "La métaphysique de Porphyre," in *Porphyre* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 12; Vandoeuvres-Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1965), 127-129, citing Calcidius, *In Tim.* 272; 335, and Proclus, *In Tim.* I. p. 202 Diehl.

57. Plutarch, *de Is. et Os.* 382D-E: "But the intellection (νόησις) of the intelligible, the pure, and the simple, shining through the soul like a flash of lightning, affords an opportunity to touch and see it but once (ἅπαξ θιγεῖν καὶ προσιδεῖν). For this reason Plato and Aristotle call this part of philosophy the epoptic or mystic part, inasmuch as those who have passed beyond these conjectural and confused matters of all sorts by means of Reason (παραμειψάμενοι τῷ λόγῳ) proceed by leaps and bounds to that primary, simple, and immaterial principle; and when they have somehow attained contact (θιγόντες) with the pure truth abiding about it, they think that they have the whole of philosophy completely, as it were, within their grasp." Clem. Alex., *Stromateis* I.28.176.1-3: "The Mosaic philosophy is accordingly divided into four parts, into the historic, and that which is specially called the legislative, which two properly belong to an ethical treatise; and the third, that which relates to sacrifice, which belongs to physical science; and the fourth, above all, the department of theology, vision, (τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος, ἡ ἐποπτεία) which Plato predicates of the truly great mysteries. And this species Aristotle calls metaphysics." Theon Smyr., *Expositio* 14,18-16,2 Hiller: "For one might say that initiation is philosophy itself, a

but also later in Philo of Alexandria (who however shunned the notion of assimilation to God), Numenius, Valentinus, Alcinous/Albinus, *Didaskalikos* (X.5-6; XXVIII.1-3), Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* V.11.71), Origen (*Contra Celsum* V.42-45) and especially Plotinus (*Ennead* VI, 7,36). What is generally common to these visionary ascents is initial purification, usually through some form of instruction involving the use of analogies, negations, and successive abstraction until the contemplative mind has become absorbed in its single object (the One, the Good, the Beautiful, etc.) at which point one "suddenly" sees the ultimate source of all these; here philosophy and intellection give way to ecstasy. In Middle Platonic metaphysics, the methods for achieving a vision of the divine were called "paths" or "ways" of ascent. The *locus classicus* for these is Alcinous/Albinus, *Didaskalikos* X.5-6 [165,14 ff. Hermann]:[58]

> The first way to achieve intellection of God is abstraction (νόησις ἡ κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν) of these attributes (i.e. bad-good-indifferent, qualified-unqualified, part-whole, same-different, mover-moved), just as we get the conception of a point by abstraction from what is sensible, conceiving first a surface, then a line, and finally a point. A second way of obtaining an idea of God is that of analogy (ἡ κατὰ ἀναλογίαν), as follows: the sun—not itself sight but enabling sight to see and visible things to be seen—is to sight and to visible things as the first mind is to the mind of the (world) soul and its intelligible objects—it is not itself intellection but provides intellection to it as well as intelligibility to its objects (παρέχει αὐτῇ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ τοῖς νοητοῖς τὸ νοεῖσθαι), illuminating the truth concerning them (cf. Plato, *Rep.* 508b). The third way of achieving an idea of God is this: one contemplates (θεωρῶν) the beauty of physical objects; after this one passes on to the beauty of the soul, from there to the beauty of customs and laws, and so on to the vast ocean of the beautiful. After this one intuits the good and the lovable and the desirable (αὐτὸ τὸ ἀγαθὸν νοεῖ καὶ τὸ ἐραστὸν καὶ ἐφετὸν) like a shining light which, as it were, illumines the soul which is thus ascending. And together with this one intuits God because of his pre-eminent excellence (θεὸν συνεπινοεῖ διὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ τιμίῳ ὑπεροχήν; cf. *Symposium* 208e; *Epistle* VII, 341C-D).

The *via analogiae* (κατὰ ανολογίαν) or way by approximation from effects to cause, inferring the source from its products or inferiors, was based on the parable of the sun in Plato's *Republic* VI 508-9.[59] The *via negationis* (κατὰ ἀφαίρεσιν or ἀπόφασιν or ἀνάλυσιν), or way by abstraction or negation of all affirmative predicates, was regarded as the only logically self-sufficient path to the divine, and was perhaps based on the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (137C-142A). This method figures prominently in the negative theologies at the beginning of the *Apocryphon of John* and in the revelation by the Luminaries in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*; it often involves two steps, a radical affirmation of the supreme principle's transcendence in terms of its priority to any notion whatsoever,[60] often by simultaneous negation of two opposed

transmission of true initiation and of the mysteries that truly are. Of initiation there are five parts. First purification (καθαρμός): for participation in the mysteries is not for all those who wish, such as have unclean hands and an unintelligible voice, but they are for those who are publicly authorized to perform them; and for those not performing them it is necessary first to obtain a certain purification. Second after purification is the bestowal of the initiation (ἡ τῆς τελετῆς παράδοσις). Third is that which is called vision (ἐποπτεία). And fourth, that which is the goal of vision, an adornment and imposition of wreaths (ἀνάδεσις καὶ στεμμάτων ἐπίθεσις), so as to be able to bestow on others the initiations that one has received, to receive torches or hierophanies or some other sacred thing. And fifth is the well-being (εὐδαιμονία) resulting from them in terms of friendliness and cohabitation with the gods. According to these things and the tradition of the Platonic accounts, first there is a certain purification (καθαρμόν τινα), as it were, the common exercise in the things properly learned from childhood. For Empedocles says it must be washed away by drawings from five wells in an unwearying bronze vessel (*Frg. d. Vorsok.* 143: κρηνάων ἀπὸ πέντ' ἀνιμῶντά φησιν ἀτειρέι χαλκῷ δεῖν ἀπορρύπτεσθαι). Plato says one must undergo purification through five sciences, which are arithmetic, geometry, stereometry, music and astronomy. To initiation he likens the philosophical transmission (παράδωσις) of theorems about logic, politics and physics. And he calls vision (ἐποπτεία) occupation with that which concerns the intelligibles, the things that really are (ὄντως ὄντα), even the ideas (τὴν περὶ τὰ νοητὰ καὶ τὰ ὄντως ὄντα καὶ τὰ τῶν ἰδεῶν πραγματείαν). One must suppose adornment and crowning is that from which one has learned both oneself to enter and to establish others in the same vision (θεωρίαν). Fifth and most perfect would be the happiness obtaining from these, according to Plato himself, even assimilation to God insofar as possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν)." See also Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* I.28.176,1-2), Origen, *In cant. cant.*, p. 75,6 Baehrens.

58. Cf. Celsus *apud* Origen, *Contra Celsum.* VII.42; Maximus of Tyre, *Dialogues* XI.11b. For these "ways," see H. DÖRRIE, "Die Frage nach dem Transzenden-

ten im Mittelplatonismus," *Les sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique V; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 213-214; A.-J. FESTUGIÈRE, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste. IV: Le Dieu inconnu et la gnose*, (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1954), 92-140; H. J. KRÄMER, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, (Amsterdam: B. R. Grüner, 1964, 2nd ed., 1967), 105-108; J. DILLON, *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 107-110.

59. Supplementing the *via analogiae* was the *via additionis* (κατὰ πρόθεσιν or σύνθεσιν) by combining all antecedent causes into a single consequence.

60. Cf. e.g., *Ennead* V, 9 [5] 3.40-45: "Thus the One is neither something nor a quality, nor a quantity nor an intellect nor a soul; neither is it moving nor even

predicates (it is neither X nor non-X), or the affirmation that it surpasses simultaneously affirmed contraries (neither X nor non-X but superior). Here the *via negativa* becomes in effect a *via oppositionis*, or way by paradoxical or oxymoronic predication of opposites: the supreme deity is neither this nor its opposite, but superior to these. The *via eminentiae* (διὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ τιμίῳ ὑπεροχήν) or way by ascending degrees (ἀναβασμοί), based on Plato's *Symposium*, corresponds to the stage by stage withdrawal (ἀναχώρησις) to the highest level of the Triple-Powered One in *Allogenes* as well as to the visionary ascents presupposed in *Zostrianos*, *Marsanes*, and *Three Steles of Seth*. This method usually builds on the others: synthesis of instances or negation of all alternatives on one level of thought launches the mind upward to a new, more eminent level of insight. There is perhaps yet a final way that transcends dialectic, the *via imitationis* (cf. Alcinous/Albinus, *Didaskalikos* XXVIII.1-3) or way by assimilation, based on Plato's *Theaetetus* 176AB, where the goal is said to be flight from this world to the other, to be assimilated (ὁμοιωθῆναι) to the divine insofar as possible. As we will see, this method seems to correspond to the "primary revelation" or non-knowing knowledge of the Unknown One in *Allogenes* and perhaps to the "command" of the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 125,15-16).

The sequence of these methods is illustrated by Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* V.11.70.8-71.5): first, purification by acceptance of the given; second, dialectical contemplation (ἐποπτεία) in which one advances by analysis (δι' ἀναλύσεως ἐκ τῶν ὑποκειμένων αὐτῷ τὴν ἀρχὴν ποιούμενοι) of the given toward primary intellection (πρώτην νόησιν) and abstraction (ἀφελόντες) of all dimension and position pertaining to corporeal and incorporeal objects (the *via negationis*) thus laying bare the pure monad, at which point one achieves the intellection of the highest being in terms of knowing what he is not.[61] So also Plotinus suggests a similar approach (*Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 36): one begins by instruction through analogies, negations, syntheses and ascending degrees; he draws near by purifications, virtues, orderings (of the soul) and gradations of the intelligible until one "stands firmly" upon it (the *via eminentiae*, cf. *Allogenes* XI 59,18-20; 60,28-31); at that point where one becomes simultaneously subject and object of one's own vision, all learning is abandoned and "suddenly" (ἐξαίφνης, cf. *Symposium* 210E; *Letter* VII 341C) one sees the source of light itself (the *via imitationis*).[62] The culmination of the vision, the *via imitationis* or way of

standing, it is not in place, not in time, but one of a kind by itself; rather it is formless before all form, before movement and before stability, since these relate to being and would make it many."

61. Clem. Alex. *Strom.* V.11.70.8-71.5: "It is not then without reason that in the mysteries that obtain among the Greeks, lustrations (τὰ καθάρσια) hold the first place; as also the laver (τὸ λουτρόν) among the barbarians. After these are the lesser mysteries, which have some foundation of instruction and of preliminary preparation for what is to come after; and the greater mysteries, in which nothing remains to be learned of the universe, but only to contemplate and comprehend (ἐποπτεύειν δὲ καὶ περινοεῖν) nature and things. We shall understand the mode of purification by confession, and that of contemplation by analysis, advancing by analysis to primary intellection (τὸν δὲ ἐποπτικὸν ἀναλύσει ἐπὶ τὴν πρώτην νόησιν προχωροῦντες), beginning with the properties underlying it; abstracting from the body its physical properties (τὰς φυσικὰς ποιότητας), taking away (περιελόντες) the dimension of depth, then that of breadth, and then that of length. For the point which remains is a unit, so to speak, having position (σημεῖόν ἐστι μονὰς ὡς εἰπεῖν θέσιν ἔχουσα); from which if we abstract position, there is the conception of unity (νοεῖται μονάς). If, then, abstracting all that belongs to bodies and things called incorporeal, we cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and thence advance into immensity by holiness, we may reach somehow to the conception of the Almighty, knowing not what He is, but what He is not (οὐχ ὅ ἐστιν. ὃ δὲ μή ἐστι γνωρίσαντες). And form and motion, or standing, or a throne, or place, or right hand or left, are not at all to be conceived as belonging to the Father of the universe, although it is so written. But what each of these means will be shown in its proper place. The First Cause is not then in space, but above both space, and time, and name, and conception (οὔκουν ἐν τόπῳ τὸ πρῶτον αἴτιον, ἀλλ' ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου καὶ ὀνόματος καὶ νοήσεως)."

62. Plotinus, *Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 36,1-26: "The rest, then, is clear, and something has been said also about this. But all the same, even now we must speak of it for a little, starting from that [experience] but proceeding by rational discourse. The knowledge or touching of the Good is the greatest thing, and Plato says it is the 'greatest study' (i.e. of the Idea of the Good, Plato, *Rep.* 505A), not calling the looking at it a 'study,' but learning about it beforehand. We are taught about it by comparisons and negations and knowledge of the things which come from it (the One) and certain methods of ascent by degrees, but we are put on the way to it by purifications and virtues and adornings and by gaining footholds in the intelligible and settling ourselves firmly there and feasting (*Phaedo* 247e) on its contents (ἀναλογίαι τε καὶ ἀφαιρέσεις καὶ γνώσεις τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναβασμοί τινες. πορεύουσι δὲ καθάρσεις πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ ἀρεταὶ καὶ κοσμήσεις καὶ τοῦ νοητοῦ ἐπιβάσεις καὶ ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἱδρύσεις καὶ τῶν ἐκεῖ ἑστιάσει). But whoever has himself become both contemplator and object of contemplation, both of himself and of the others, becoming being and intellect and 'the complete living being' (Plato, *Tim.* 31B), no longer looks at it from outside—when he has become this he is near and that Good is next above him, and already close by, shining upon all the intelligible world. It is there that one lets all study go; up to a point one has been led along

assimilation, transcends philosophy for mysticism or ecstasy.[63] Since it involves contemplative imitation of the virtues of which the divine is the source, and since his peculiar virtues are oneness, simplicity, aloneness, aloofness, tranquillity and absolute goodness, the *via imitationis* is the ascetic way, a purgative stripping away of all multiplicity, of all powers of soul and intellect, a self-concentration into pure solitariness where no object of knowledge exists outside the knower. At this point, to know is not to know.

The prototype for this sequence of cognitive and visionary acts comprising the *via eminentiae* is found in Plato's *Symposium* (210A-212A) in the speech where Socrates recounts the path to the vision of absolute

and settled firmly in beauty and as far as this one thinks that in which one is, but is carried out of it by the surge of the wave of Intellect itself and lifted on high by a kind of swell and sees suddenly, not seeing how, but the vision fills his eyes with light and does not make him see another through itself, but the light itself is what he sees (ἐξενεχθεὶς δὲ τῷ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ οἷον κύματι καὶ ὑψοῦ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ οἷον οἰδήσαντος ἀρθεὶς εἰσεῖδεν ἐξαίφνης οὐκ ἰδὼν ὅπως, ἀλλ' ἡ θέα πλήσασα φωτὸς τὰ ὄμματα οὐ δι αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο ὁρᾶν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς τὸ ὅραμα ἦν). For there is not in that Good something seen and its light, nor intellect and object of intellect, but a ray which generates these afterwards and lets them be beside it; but he himself is the ray which only generates Intellect and does not extinguish itself in the generation, but it itself abides (αὐτὸς δὲ αὐγὴ μόνον γεννῶσα νοῦν, οὔτι σβέσασα αὐτῆς ἐν τῳ γεννῆσαι, ἀλλὰ μείνασα μὲν αὐτή), and that Intellect comes to be because this Good exists. For if this was not of the kind it is, that would not have come into existence." (trans. Armstrong)

63. Indeed, assimilation to God involves a withdrawal, a "flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming like the divine as far as we can, and that again is to become righteous with the help of wisdom" (διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν οτάχιστα, φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι· *Theaetetus* 176AB). As Plotinus makes clear (*Ennead* VI, 9 [9] 11,9-16), this is not an agitated ecstasy, but a calm union: "He (the seer) was one with himself, with no distinction in himself either in relation to himself or to other things—for there was no movement in him nor emotion, no desire for anything else when he made the ascent—but there was not even any reason or thought, nor, if one may say so, any self at all. Rather he was as if seized up or possessed by a god, in a quiet isolation and in a stable, firm standing, neither inclining anywhere in his own being, nor revolving about himself, completely still and having become a kind of rest." (ἦν δὲ ἓν καὶ αὐτὸς διαφορὰν ἐν αὐτῷ οὐδεμίαν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἔχων οὔτε κατὰ ἄλλα οὐ γάρ τι ἐκινεῖτο παρ' αὐτῷ, οὐ θυμός, οὐκ ἐπιθυμία ἄλλου παρῆν αὐτῷ ἀναβεβηκότι ἀλλ' οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδέ τις νόησις οὐδ' ὅλως αὐτός, εἰ δεῖ καὶ τοῦτο λέγειν.'Αλλ' ὥσπερ ἁρπασθεὶς ἢ ἐνθουσιάσας ἡσυχῇ ἐν ἐρήμῳ καὶ καταστάσει γεγένηται ἀτρεμεῖ, τῇ αὐτοῦ οὐσίᾳ οὐδαμῇ ἀποκλίνων οὐδὲ περὶ αὐτὸν στρεφόμενος, ἑστὼς πάντη καὶ οἷον στάσις γενόμενος).

beauty into which he had been initiated by the wise Diotima. The method consists of a three-stage qualitative and quantitative purification or purgation of the soul by a redirection of Eros, the moving force of the soul, away from the lower realm to the higher.[64] The qualitative purgation is a progressive shift of attention from the sensible to the intelligible realm in three levels of knowing, which correspond to three levels of experience: physical beauty, moral beauty and intellectual beauty; these are the objects respectively of the bodily senses, the ethical components of the soul, and the intelligizing, contemplative faculty of the reflective soul. The quantitative purgation is a shift of attention away from individual instances of beauty, to the ideal beauty of all forms, and finally to absolute beauty itself, which then discloses itself as a sudden (ἐξαίφνης) and immediate intuition. The next higher stage is therefore achieved by a purifying and unifying synthesis of the experience of the lower stage.

> And so when going beyond such things on account of appropriate devotion to boyish beauty, one begins to contemplate that beauty, one might almost be in reach of the goal. For this is the appropriate way to approach or be lead toward the beloved: beginning from instances of beautiful things, for the sake of that eternal beauty he mounts ever upward, as if making use of successive degrees (ἐπαναβασμοί), from one to two and from both to every beautiful body, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful institutions, and from institutions to beautiful science, and from science in general to succeed to that science which is nothing other than the science of ultimate beauty itself, and might culminate in knowing what beauty itself is. (*Symposium* 211B5-D1)

As in the *Symposium*, so also in the *Republic* the final moment of attainment is conceived as a revelation of the supreme form. After long preliminary effort, one's soul or mind has transcended discursive science, and even dialectic itself, for an unmediated vision or direct contact with the object sought. No longer does one "know about" the object things that can be predicated of it, but one actually possesses and is possessed by the object of one's quest.[65]

64. I here adopt the analysis of E. O'Brien, *The Essential Plotinus* (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), 16-17.

65. In *Republic* VII 540A the vision of the ultimate Good follows upon much training and travail: "At age fifty those who have survived the tests and approved themselves altogether the best in every task and form of knowledge must be brought at last to the goal. They are required to turn upward the vision of the soul and gaze upon that which illumines all (ἀνακλίναντας τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς αὐγὴν εἰς αὐτὸ

> This, then, at last, Glaucon, I said, is the very law which dialectic recites, the strain which it executes, of which, though it belongs to the intelligible, we may see an imitation in the progress of the faculty of vision, as we described its endeavor to look at living things themselves and the stars themselves and finally at the very sun. In like manner, when anyone by dialectic attempts through discourse of reason (διὰ τοῦ λόγου) and apart from all perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν) of each thing and does not desist till he apprehends by thought itself (αὐτῇ νοήσει) the nature of the good in itself, he arrives at the limit of the intelligible (τῷ τοῦ νοητοῦ τέλει), as the other in our parable came to the goal of the visible. (*Republic* VII 532A-B)

Similar statements are also found in the Seventh Platonic Letter, and later on in Philo and Numenius.[66]

F. Learned Ignorance

Vision of the very highest level can be characterized as a "learned ignorance," a passive intuition free from all discursive, calculative and analytic reasoning. Thinking only imposes spatial and temporal distinctions on the object of its thought, thus destroying the horizonless unity between knower and known. As the *Chaldaean Oracles* put it, the supreme intelligible is comprehended only with an empty mind:

> For there exists a certain Intelligible which you must perceive by the flower of mind. For if you should incline your mind toward it and perceive it as perceiving a specific thing, you would not perceive it. For it is the

ἀποβλέψαι τό πᾶσι φῶς παρέχον), and when they have thus beheld the good itself (ἰδόντας τὸ ἀγαθὸν αὐτό), they shall use it as a model ... " Indeed Plato seems to have applied this three-stage progression not only to his own study of philosophy but also to the program of study in the Academy he founded (see H. CHERNISS, *The Riddle of the Early Academy* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1945], 60-85). In the seventh book of the *Republic* (533e-540b) he lays down the plan for educating the guardians of the ideal state: after the propaedeutic study of mathematics, one took up the study of dialectic for five years, and then after a fifteen year period of fieldwork, one is at the stable and mature age of fifty ready for the goal, the highest philosophy, contemplation of the ideas.

66. *Letter* VII 341C-D: after long instruction and familiarity, the "thing itself" is suddenly (ἐξαίφνης) generated and becomes self-sustaining in the soul; 344b: after patient scrutiny and disputation, at last understanding blazes up and the mind, stretched to the limit, is flooded with light. In much the same way, though in a later century, Philo of Alexandria (*De migratione Abrahami* 31-35) describes the sudden (ἐξαίφνης) filling of his soul with ideas under the influence of divine, prophetic inspiration, and Numenius (frg. 2 des Places) describes the sudden (μιᾷ βολῇ) glimpse of the Good granted to the eyes that strain to see it.

> power of strength, visible all around, flashing with intellectual divisions. Therefore, you must not perceive that Intelligible violently but with the flame of mind completely extended which measures all things, except that Intelligible. You must not perceive it intently, but keeping the pure eye of your soul turned away, you should extend an empty mind toward the Intelligible in order to comprehend it, since it exists outside of (your) mind (frg. 1 Majercik).

According to Celsus (*apud* Origen, *Contra Celsum* VII.45,21-25), God "is neither mind nor intelligence nor knowledge, but enables the mind to think and causes the existence of intelligibles, of truth itself and of being itself, since he transcends all things and is intelligible by a certain ineffable power" (ἀρρήτῳ τινὶ δύναμει νοητός). The anonymous commentator on Plato's *Parmenides* likewise speaks of "a non-comprehending comprehension and in an intellection that intuits nothing," a silent preconception of the ineffable:

> It is necessary therefore to subtract everything and add nothing: to subtract everything, not by falling into absolute non-being, but by thought attending to everything that comes to and through him, considering that he is the cause of both the multitude and the being of all things, while himself being neither one nor multiple, but beyond being in regard to all the things that exist on his account. Thus he transcends not only multiplicity, but even the concept of the One, for it is on his account that both the One and Monad exist. And thus one will be able neither to fall into the void, nor dare to attribute anything to him, but to remain in a non-comprehending comprehension and in an intellection that intuits nothing. Through such means, it will occur to you at some point, having stood apart from the intellection of the things constituted by him, to stand upon the ineffable preconception of him which represents him through silence, a preconception that is unaware of being silent and not conscious that it represents him and is cognizant of nothing at all, but which is only an image of the ineffable and is ineffably identical with the ineffable, but not as if knowing him, if you can follow me—even though imaginatively—as I venture to speak (*In Parmenidem* II 4-27 Hadot 2.68-70).

This "non-comprehending comprehension" and "intellection that intuits nothing" appears to be identical to the culminating experience envisaged in the "primary revelation" of *Allogenes*, namely the command to know the Unknown One by not knowing him (XI 59,9-60,12; 63,28-64,14), and is perhaps also equivalent to the silence culminating the ascent in the *Three Steles of Seth*. It has its roots in the sudden vision of the Beautiful culminating the three-stage ascent described in Plato's *Symposium*. To be sure, the roots have been bent in a very ascetic direction, perhaps

by Neopythagorean rigorism and the Gnostic spirit itself, but the fruit continues to bear the stamp of the Platonic tradition.

To know the truly ultimate, Plotinus emphasizes that one must go beyond not only discursive reasoning, but even intellection itself. Not even the supreme One intelligizes itself; whoever would know the supreme must not know it:

> The One, as transcending Intellect, transcends knowing: above all need, it is above the need of the knowing which pertains solely to the Secondary Nature. Knowing is a unitary thing, but defined: the first is One, but undefined: a defined One would not be the One-absolute: the absolute is prior to the definite. [13] Thus the One is in truth beyond all statement: any affirmation is of a thing; but the all-transcending, resting above even the most august divine Mind, possesses alone of all true being, and is not a thing among things; we can give it no name because that would imply predication: we can but try to indicate, in our own feeble way, something concerning it: when in our perplexity we object, "Then it is without self-perception, without self-consciousness, ignorant of itself"; we must remember that we have been considering it only in its opposites. If we make it knowable, an object of affirmation, we make it a manifold; and if we allow intellection in it we make it at that point indigent: supposing that in fact intellection accompanies it, intellection by it must be superfluous. Self-intellection—which is the truest—implies the entire perception of a total self formed from a variety converging into an integral; but the Transcendent knows neither separation of part nor any such inquiry; if its intellectual act were directed upon something outside, then, the Transcendent would be deficient and the intellection faulty. (*Ennead* V, 3 [49] 12-13 Armstrong)

According to K. Corrigan,[67] the question of how we are to speak about the One, and on what basis, is a major philosophical problem for Plotinus, for "if the One thinks, then it will be an intellect" linked to an intelligible object; but "if it does not think, then it will be ignorant even of itself" (ἀνόητον δὲ ἀγνωήσει καὶ ἑαυτό). Plotinus, in fact, is not prepared to accept the hypothesis of learned ignorance because he appears to hold that intellection cannot be completely abstract, but must

67. K. Corrigan, "The Anonymous Turin Commentary on the Parmenides and the Distinction between Essence and Existence in Middle Platonism, Plotinus' Circle, and Sethian Gnostic texts," paper presented at the Seminar on Gnosticism and Later Platonism, Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, November 1996, p. 54.

be based on something familiar to us. In response to an interlocutor who has to be convinced on this question, he says:

> For even if we say that it is the Good and absolutely simple, we shall not be saying anything clear and distinct, even though we are speaking the truth, as long as we do not have anything on which to base our reasoning when we speak (ἐπὶ τί ἐρείδοντες τὴν διάνοιαν λέγομεν) For, again, since knowledge (τῆς γνώσεως) of other things comes to us from intellect, and we are able to know intellect by intellect (τῷ νῷ νοῦν γινώσκειν), by what sort of simple intuition (ἐπιβολὴ ἀθρόᾳ) could one grasp this which transcends the nature of intellect? We shall say to the person to whom we have to explain how this is possible, that it is by the likeness in ourselves. For there is something of it in us too; or rather there is nowhere where it is not, in the things which can participate in it. For, wherever you are, it is from this that you have that which is everywhere present by setting to it that which can have it (Τὸ γὰρ πανταχοῦ παρὸν στήσας ὀπισοῦν τὸ δυνάμενον ἔχειν ἔχεις ἐκεῖθεν); just as if there was a voice filling an empty space, or, with the empty space, men too, and by setting yourself to listen at any point in the empty space, you will receive the whole, and yet not the whole. What is it, then, which we shall receive when we set our intellect to it? Rather, the intellect must return, so to speak, backwards (οἷον εἰς τοὐπίσω ἀναχωρεῖν), and give itself up, in a way, to what lies behind it (for it faces in both directions) (οἷον ἑαυτὸν ἀφέντα τοῖς εἰς ὄπισθεν αὐτοῦ ἀμφίστομον ὄντα); and there (κακεῖ for κἀκεῖνα), if it wishes to see that First Principle, it must not be altogether intellect. For it is the first life, since it is an activity in the outgoing of all things. (*Ennead* III, 8 [30] 9,16-33 Armstrong)

The One is the most fundamental and familiar—and therefore most overlooked and unknown—presence everywhere (cf. *Ennead* V, 5 [32] 12), so for intellect to see it, it must indeterminately withdraw rather than determinately advance. As we shall see, the interlocutor here presupposed may well be a Sethian Platonist such as the kind reflected in *Allogenes*, according to which one approaches the knowledge of the supreme Unknown One by a "withdrawal" (ἀναχωρεῖν) from one's discursive intellection and intellectual vision in favor of a "primary revelation" enabling one to know the One as if not knowing it: "through them all he is in them all, not only as the unknowable knowledge that is proper to him, and he is joined by the ignorance that sees him" (XI 64,8-14).

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE DIVINE AND COSMIC HIERARCHY OF THE PLATONIZING SETHIAN TREATISES: I

I. The Realm Beyond Being

Within the Sethian corpus, it is the four treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes* that introduce into Sethian literature a distinctive fund of metaphysical conceptuality that draws heavily on the technical terminology of Platonic philosophy. In comparison with the other and probably earlier members of the Sethian corpus such as the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, these treatises display no traces of Christian thought, and display a severe attenuation of interest in the Genesis-inspired anthropogony and history of Adam, Eve, Seth and his progeny.

Within the entire Sethian corpus, the *Apocryphon of John* occupies a unique position by dint of both its multiple versions and its initial position in most of the codices that contain it. Furthermore, some version of this treatise, or at least certain of the sources it incorporates, certainly circulated in the early to mid-second century, making it one of the earlier Sethian sources. It also exhibits the most complete version of the Sethian mythology that seems to underlie the entire corpus by way of including a treatment of first principles, a theogony, cosmogony, and an anthropogony whose overall structure seems to be inspired by Platonic physics and metaphysics, especially of the sort contained in Plato's *Timaeus*. Basic to its picture of the nature of reality and the human condition is the Platonic doctrine of model and copy and its speculations on the relation between permanence and change and between original unity and derived multiplicity, matters that are even more extensively treated—with important modifications—in the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

According to the metaphysical scheme of the *Apocryphon of John*, the unfolding of the primal Monad into multiplicity occurs as a process of

mental reflection by which the primal principle externalizes itself so as to avail itself both for itself and for others:[1]

> **II 4** [19] And it is he alone (the Invisible Spirit) who looks [20] at him(self) in his light which surrounds him. [21] This is the source of the Living Water [22] which supplies all the aeons. In every way (direction?) he [gazes] [23] [upon] his image which he sees [24] in the source of the [Spirit]. He invests his intention in his [25] luminous [water, that is], the source of the [26] [pure] light-water [which] surrounds him. And [27] [his Ennoia became] active and she came [28] forth, namely she who had [appeared] before him [29] in [the radiance] of his light. This is [30] the first [power which was] before them all, [31] [manifested from] his thought, [32] that [is, the Pronoia of the All].

In this way, the monadic Father emits his own Thought (ἔννοια, often called πρόνοια or Barbelo), which the Sethian Platonizing treatises refer to as the "Aeon of Barbelo." In turn, this feminine figure becomes the mother of a self-generated (αὐτογενής) Son, thus giving rise to a supreme divine triad: the monadic Invisible Spirit; his first thought, the Mother Barbelo; and her self-generated Son. This supreme Father-Mother-Child triad—a nomenclature that may derive from Plato's *Timaeus* (50D2-4)—is the supreme and central metaphysical entity of the earlier Sethian treatises, such as the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*.

As a whole, the Platonizing Sethian treatises draw on similar conceptions, but in a strikingly innovative way: they seem to have completely jettisoned the earlier Father-Mother-Child nomenclature for the supreme triad in favor of an absolute monism that completely reconceptualizes the older triadic metaphysics. Rather than a triad of supreme principles, two new triads, presided over by a supreme unitary principle, are proposed: the first is the Triple Powered One, a triad of abstract powers somehow contained in the supreme deity itself and yet also sometimes treated as a new second principle mediating between the supreme principle and Barbelo, which has the effect of demoting Barbelo from the rank of second principle to third. The second triad is Barbelo, conceived as an aeon containing a triad of subaeons, those of Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes. The Triple Powered One is regarded—as was Barbelo—as a tripartite being. Furthermore, the traditional Sethian supreme deity, the Invisible Spirit—who is closely identified with the Triple Powered One as second principle—now becomes identified as—or even superseded by—a supreme "Unknowable One" that has been adopted by these Sethian authors from contemporary Middle Platonic sources occupied with the theological interpretation of the first two hypotheses of Plato's *Parmenides*. In the process, the erstwhile "Mother" figure, Barbelo, is no longer conceived as the feminine Mother of the Autogenes Child, but as the masculine Aeon (ὁ αἰών) of Barbelo. As a result, the erstwhile Child-figure, the Autogenes Son of Barbelo, is demoted from the rank of third member in a triad of supreme beings, and becomes merely the lowest of the three sublevels of the Barbelo Aeon. Indeed, in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, a new Child figure emerges, the Triple Male Child, a being who resides at various levels in the Barbelo Aeon and often functions as the Savior.

The metaphysics of the Platonizing Sethian treatises comprises four ontological levels: 1) a highest realm beyond being itself (the Unknowable One or the Invisible Spirit and his Triple Power), below which there is 2) an atemporal, intelligible realm of pure incorporeal being (the Aeon of Barbelo), then 3) an incorporeal psychic realm (the Self-generated Aeons, the Repentance, and Sojourn) characterized by time and motion, and finally 4) a physical, corporeal realm at the bottom of the scale, which *Allogenes* calls "Nature" and *Marsanes* calls the cosmic and material realms designated by the first three of thirteen "Seals." In fact, *Marsanes* boasts of yet another, super-transcendent level clearly beyond the Invisible Spirit, occupied by a supreme but aloof "Unknown Silent One."

Marsanes (X 4,24-5,25) also develops a set of metaphysical categories that serve to articulate the scale of reality ("that which truly exists"). There is a basic distinction between eternal reality apprehended by the intellect alone and the sense-perceptible realm of change and becoming; the former is incorporeal and the latter is corporeal. To the former category belong: unbegotten (uncaused) entities (the Unknown Silent One); entities whose existence has a cause ("begotten"), whether insubstantial (i.e., the Invisible Spirit and Triple Powered One) or substantial (i.e., the Barbelo Aeon, other divine aeons, angels, souls, "soul garments," images of intelligible "simples," and celestial and terrestrial bodies). The following table illustrates a possible distribution of these metaphysical categories among some of the major beings located in the hierarchy of

1. Here Barbelo emerges from the Father's mental self-reflection in the living Light-Water of the Sethian baptismal rite rather than from the more abstract emanative processes of the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

the thirteen seals (Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes, and the Self-generated Aeons are here included with the Aeon of Barbelo):

Silent One	incorporeal	insubstantial	neither intelligible nor perceptible
Invisible Spirit	incorporeal	insubstantial	neither intelligible nor perceptible
Triple Powered One	incorporeal	insubstantial	intelligible
Barbelo Aeon	incorporeal	substantial	intelligible
Sojourn/Repentance	incorporeal	substantial	perceptible (immortal souls and images)
Cosmic/Material	corporeal	substantial	perceptible (three dimensional bodies)
Matter	incorporeal	insubstantial	neither intelligible nor perceptible

A. The Invisible Spirit

In all the Sethian treatises save *Marsanes* and perhaps *Allogenes*, the highest being, corresponding to the Plotinian One, is the Invisible Spirit or Unknowable One, characterized by non-being existence, silence and stillness. It is so transcendent that it is altogether beyond conceptualization. The major vehicle for this characterization is an extended negative theology (*via negativa*) of the sort discussed in Chapter 9 in connection with Alcinous and the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary, employing terms nearly identical to those of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* in an attempt to characterize an absolutely self-sufficient supreme Unity. This negative theology combines the two classical epistemological approaches, the *via negativa* and *via eminentiae*: the *via negativa* is implemented by negative predications followed by an adversative "but" clause: the negation may be either triple, "it is neither X nor Y nor Z, but it is ..." or antithetically double, "it is neither X nor non-X, but it is ..." or merely single, "it is not X but it is ...." The "but" clause is always positive: "but it is something else" above, beyond, superior to the previously negated predications. Negation of all alternatives on one level of thought launches the mind upward to a new, more eminent level of insight. A similar characterization of the supreme deity occurs in both *Allogenes* and the *Apocryphon of John*, whose theogony begins with a negative-theological description of the supreme deity, the Monad or Invisible Spirit, the first member of the Father, Mother and Child triad. These two treatises share a negative theology, part of which contains a word-for-word parallel that probably depends upon a common source, most likely a commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, especially the first hypothesis, 137C-142A:

Allogenes NHC XI 62,28-63,25	*Apocryphon of John* BG 24,6-25,7	*Apocryphon of John* NHC II 3,17-33
XI 62 [28] He is neither Divinity [29] nor Blessedness [30] nor Perfection. Rather [31] it (this triad) is an unknowable entity of him, [32] not what is proper to him. Rather [33] he is something else [34] superior to the Blessedness and [35] the Divinity and [36] Perfection.	**BG 24** [6] This is the Immeasurable Light, [7] pure, holy, [26] spotless, ineffable, [9] [perfect in in-] corruptibility. He is neither [10] Perfection nor [11] Blessedness nor Divinity, [12]	**II 3** [17] [He] is [the Immeasurable Light], [18] pure, holy, [spotless]. [19] He is ineffable, [perfect in in]corruptibility, [20] He is not in [perfection or in] [21] blessedness [or in] [22] divinity,
For he is not [37] perfect, but he is another thing **63** [1] that is superior.	but rather something superior [13] to them.	[but rather he is far superior]. [23]
He is neither [2] boundless nor [3] is he bounded by [4] another. Rather he is something superior. [5]	He is neither infinite [14] nor unlimited, [15] but rather he is something better than these.	
He is not corporeal; [6] he is not incorporeal. [7] He is not Great; [he is not] Small. [8] He is not a <quantity>; he is not a [<quality>]. [9]	For [16] he is neither corporeal [17] nor incorporeal; he is not Great, he is not [18] Small, nor is he a quantity [19] nor a <quality>.	[He is] neither corporeal [nor incorporeal], [24] he is not Great, [nor] is he Small. [There is no] [25] way to say "What is his quantity?" or "What [is his quality?"], [26] for
Nor is he something [10] that exists, that [11] one can know. Rather [12] he is something else that is superior, that [13] one cannot know. [14]	For it is not possible for anyone to [20] intelligize him.	it is not possible [for anyone to comprehend him]. [27]
He is primary revelation [15] and self-knowledge, [16] since it is he alone who knows himself. [17] Since he is not one of those things [18] that exist, but is another thing, [19] he is superior to	He is not any of the [21] existing things, but is instead superior [22] to them. He is not anything	He is not anything among [existing things, but rather he is] [28] far superior–

Allogenes NHC XI 62,28-63,25	*Apocryphon of John* BG 24,6-25,7	*Apocryphon of John* NHC II 3,17-33
all superlatives, [20] even in comparison to his character and [21] what is not his character.	among existing things, but rather something superior to these–	
	not 'superior' in the comparative sense, but **25**[1] in the absolute sense. [2] Not participating in eternity, time [3] does not exist for him.	not 'superior' in the comparative sense, but rather in the absolute sense. [29] He [participates neither] in eternity nor [30] in time.
He neither participates in [22] eternity nor [23] does he participate in time. [24]	For one who participates [4] in eternity, others [5] anticipated. [6] Time did not limit him, since he	For that which [participates in eternity] [31] was previously anticipated. He [was not limited] [32]
He does not receive anything from [25] anything else.	does not [7] receive from some other who limits. [8] And he has no need. There is nothing [9] at all before him.	by time, [since] he [33] receives nothing, [for it would be something received] [34] on loan. For what is prior does not [lack] [35] so as to receive.

According to the material common to the *Apocryphon of John* and *Allogenes*, the Unknown One is neither divinity nor blessedness nor goodness, but superior to these; neither boundless nor bounded, but superior; neither corporeal nor incorporeal, neither great nor small, neither a quantity nor quality,[2] nor a knowable existent, but superior; he shares in neither time nor eternity (αἰών); he does not receive from another; neither is he diminished nor does he diminish nor is he undiminished (the Platonic concept of undiminished giving). He is without being (XI 62,23; 63,9-10; 63,17-18; 65,28-30; 65,32-33; 66,25-28), yet he is "something," "another thing" (XI 62,37; 63,12.18, in the Stoic sense of a τι, something real, not a figment of imagination). Although strictly beyond existence, he has a "non-being existence" (XI 62,23; 65,33), a pre-existing or prefigurative or paradigmatic existence from which actual Existence derives.

2. The text of the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 24,18-19; NHC III 5,13) reads ⲛⲟⲩⲧⲁⲙⲓⲟ ⲁⲛ ⲡⲉ ("he is not a creature"), translating an erroneous Greek exemplar ποιητόν (creature) for an original ποιόν (quality).

The *Apocryphon of John* prefaces this parallel section with even more such negative "attributes": the Invisible Spirit is unlimited, without quantity, neither corporeal nor incorporeal, neither Great nor Small, immeasurable, neither eternal nor in time, ineffable, unnamable, invisible, unsearchable, undergoing nothing, and not anything among those things that exist. But it also has positive attributes: it is the ultimate Monad and Father of the All, the Invisible Spirit higher than God; it is total perfection, pure Mind, life-giving life, blessedness-giving blessedness, knowledge-giving knowledge, goodness-giving goodness, mercy-giving mercy, and grace-giving grace, yet transcends all these attributes. In particular, the author also emphasizes the Monad's superiority to any of its attributes, including a rather traditional sounding triad of attributes, Blessedness, Perfection and Divinity, a superiority echoed also in *Allogenes*.[3]

One finds another such negative theology also in *Zostrianos* (VIII 64,13-66,11), in which the supreme deity can only be characterized negatively (the *via negativa*) and as superlative to all else (the *via eminentiae*); this passage has a nearly word-for-word parallel in Victorinus' *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-40; clearly both authors are dependent on a common source, again quite likely a Middle Platonic commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*:[4]

3. In the order of the *Apocryphon of John*, the equivalencies seem to be: perfection ≅ life; blessedness ≅ intellect; divinity ≅ existence; in the order of *Allogenes*: divinity ≅ existence; blessedness ≅ intellect; perfection ≅ life. This suggests that already in the *Apocryphon of John* there was some opposition to an antecedent doctrine which posited a triadic structure inherent in the Monad itself, somewhat analogous to the father (or existence), power, intellect triad latent within the supreme Father of the *Chaldaean Oracles*. It may be that this triad (in reverse order) is a precursor of the Existence-Life-Mind triad to be found in the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

4. See now M. TARDIEU, "Recherches sur la formation de l'Apocalypse de Zostrien et les sources de Marius Victorinus," in *Res Orientales IX* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1996), 7-114, and my introduction and commentary in C. Barry, W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, J. D. Turner, *Zostrien (NH VIII, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 24; Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000), 32-225; 483-662.

Victorinus, *Adv. Arium* I.49,9-40	*Zostrianos* VIII 64,13-66,11
49, [9] **Before all the authentic existents was the One or the Monad** or [10] One in itself, One before being was present to it. For one must call "One" [11] and conceive as One whatever has in itself no appearance of [12] otherness. It is the One alone, the simple One, the One so-called by [13] concession. It is the One before all existence, before [14] all existentiality and absolutely before all inferiors, [15] before Being, for this One is prior to Being; he is thus [16] before every entity, substance, hypostasis, and before [17] all realities with even more potency. It is the One without existence, without substance, [18] <life>, or intellect—for it is beyond all that—	64 [13] [He] was a [unity] [14] and a single one, [15] existing prior to [all those] [16] that truly exist (Cf. *Allogenes* XI 61,32-39: **XI 61** [32] *Now he is* [33] *an entity insofar as he exists, in that he either* [34] *exists and will become,* [35] *or {acts} <lives> or knows, although he {lives}<acts>* [36] *without Mind* [37] *or Life or Existence* [38] *or Non-existence,* [39] *incomprehensibly.*)
immeasurable, [19] invisible, **absolutely indiscernible by anything else, by the realities that are** [20] **in it, by those that come after it, even those that come from it;** [21] **for itself alone, it is** distinct and **definite by its own existence,** [22] not by act, of such a sort that its own constitution [23] and knowledge it has of itself is not something other than itself; absolutely **indivisible, without shape,** [24] **without quality** or lack of quality, nor qualified by absence of quality; **without** [25] **color, without species, without form,** privated of all the forms, [26] without being the form in itself by which all things are formed.	in [an] [17] immeasurable Spirit, completely indiscernible [18] by anything else [19] that [exists] [20] in him and [outside] [21] him and [remains] [22] after him. It is he alone [23] who delimits himself, [65] [1] [part]less, [2] [shape]less, [quality]less, [3] [color]less, [specie]less, [4] [form]less to them [all]. [5]
It is the **first cause of all** the existents whether they are [27] universals or particulars, [28] the **principle prior to every principle,** [29] **intelligence prior to every intelligence, the vigor of every power,** [30] **more mobile than movement itself, more stable than rest itself**—for it is rest by an inexpressible [31] movement and it is a	[He precedes] them all: [6] [he is pre-principle of] [7] [every principle], fore[thought] [8] [of] every thought, [9] [strength] of every power. [10] [He is faster] <than> [his] [11] [motion], he is more stable <than> [12] stability,

Victorinus, *Adv. Arium* I.49,9-40	*Zostrianos* VIII 64,13-66,11
superlative [32] movement by an ineffable rest; **more condensed than every continuity, more exalted than every** [33] **distance; more finite than every body** and greater than every [34] magnitude, **purer than every incorporeal entity, more penetrating than every intelligence** [35] **and every body; of all realities it has the most potency,** it is the potency [36] of all potencies; more universal than everything, **every genus, every species, it is in an absolutely universal way the truly** [37] **Existent, being itself the totality of the authentic existents, greater than** [38] **every totality whether corporeal or incorporeal, more particular** [39] **than every part, by a <pure> ineffable potency being <preeminently> all the authentic** [40] **existents.**	he is more [compact] [13] <than> [evèn] limitless [14] compaction. [And] he is more exalted than [16] any unfathomable entity, and he is [17] more [definite] than any corporeal entity, [18] he is purer than any incorporeal entity, [19] he is more penetrating than any [20] thought and any body, [21] [being] more powerful than them all, [22] any genus or species. [23] He is their totality: [66] [1] [the whole of true] existence, [2] and [those who truly] exist; [3] [he is] all [these. For he is greater] [4] [than everything, corporeal] [5] [and incorporeal alike], [6] [more] particular [than] [7] [all the] parts. [8] Existing by a [pure un-] [9] knowable [power, he] from whom [10] [derive] all those [11] that truly exist.

The negative attributes of the Spirit mostly derive directly from the *Parmenides*, while others are transferred from the *Phaedrus* or derive from the description of matter in the *Timaeus*.[5]

Just as in the *Apocryphon of John* and—to a lesser extent—*Allogenes*, the negative theology of the source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos* is immediately followed by an affirmative theology that designates the One as a threefold Spirit; the Latin and Coptic no longer reproduce the same text, although they exhibit thematic and conceptual parallels:

Adversus Arium I.50,10-16; 50,1-9	*Zostrianos* VIII 66,14b-68,13
50 [10] Since it is one in its simplicity, it contains three powers: [11] **all Existence, all Life, and Blessedness; but** [12] **all these are one, even a simple one,** and it is predominantly in the power	66 [14] For they are [triple] [15] powers of his [unity]: [16] [complete] Existence, [17] Life and [18] Blessedness. In [19] Existence he exists [as] [20] a simple unity, (cf. *Allogenes* **XI 49** [28] *Essentiality* [29]

5. *Parmenides* 140C3, 140d4 (immeasurable), 136D7-138A1 (invisible), 139B-E (indiscernible), 137C4-D3 (partless; cf. *Sophist* 245A), 137D9 (shapeless); *Phaedrus* 247C6-7 (colorless and shapeless); *Timaeus* 50D7, 51A8 (formless), 50E4 (specieless); Alcinoos, *Didaskalikos* X 165,10-13 Hermann (qualityless).

Adversus Arium I.50,10-16; 50,1-9

[13] of being—that is Existence—that the powers of Life [14] and Blessedness exist, for that by which it is and exists is the power [15] of Existence, and this is also the power of Life and Blessedness. It is itself [16] and by itself **the idea and rational expression** (λόγος) **of itself**.

I 50 [1] This (One) is God, this is the Father, **preintelligence** preexisting [2] and preexistence preserving itself in its own **Blessedness** and a motionless [3] motion and, because of this, [4] **having no need of other beings**; perfect beyond perfect things, a Spirit triple powered in [5] its unity, **perfect Spirit** and Spirit beyond spirit; for he does not [6] breathe, but rather it is the Spirit in that which is his being, Spirit [7] breathing toward itself so that it is Spirit, since the Spirit [8] is not separate from itself.

It is at the same time **residence and resident**, [9] remaining in itself, alone in itself alone.

50 [16] having his **living and acting** [17] in his own proper **non-existent existence**

Adversus Arium I.50,9-10.16-21

50 [9] existing at the same time **everywhere and** [10] **nowhere**.

Zostrianos VIII 66,14b-68,13

constantly includes its [30] *Vitality and Mentality,* [31] *and* [32] *Vitality includes* [33] *Substantiality and* [34] *Mentality; Mentality includes* [35] *Life and Essentiality.*)

VIII 66 [21] his own [rational expression] and idea. [22]

66 [22] Whomever he will find [23] he brings into [24] being. [And in] [25] Vitality, he is alive [and becomes;] **67** [1] [in Blessedness] [2] [he comes to] [3] [have Mentality]. [4] [And he] knows [that] all these [5] [become] uniquely him, [6] for [no] divinity [7] [is concerned with anything] except [what] [8] [is his] alone, and he [exists] [9] [alone] in himself [with] [10] [himself], the single, [perfect] [11] [Spirit]. For he dwells [12] [within] that which is his, which [exists] [13] [as] a idea of an idea, [14] [a] unity of the [15] [Henad. He exists as [the] [16] [Spirit], inhabiting it [17] by intellect, and it inhabits [18] him. He is not about to come forth to any [19] place, because he [is] a single [20] perfect, simple Spirit. [21]
He is his own place and [22] he is its inhabitant. [23] Indeed <he is> everything. And [24] on the other hand, [there] is the one who **[68]** [1] [exists in] [2] [Mentality] and [Life], [3] even [its] inhabitant. [4] And the Life [5] is [an] activity of the [6] insubstantial [Existence]. [7] That which exists in [them] [8] [exists] in him; [9] because of [him they exist as] [10] blessed[ness] and [11] perfect[ion]. And [it is the power] [12] that exists in [all those] [13] that truly exist.

Zostrianos VIII 74,17-75,23

74 [17] It is everywhere and [18] nowhere that he [empowers] [19] and activates them all. [20] The ineffable, [21] unnamable one—it is [22] from himself that he [truly] exists, [23]

Adversus Arium I.50,9-10.16-21

50 [16] **It has its life and act** [17] **in its own Existence** which is [18] not Existence;
union **without distinction of the Spirit** with itself, **divinity,** [19] **substantiality, blessedness, mentality, vitality, goodness,** [20] being **absolutely all things** in a universal mode, **purely unengendered, preexisting,** [21] **unity of union** which is not itself union.

Zostrianos VIII 74,17-75,23

resting himself [in] [24] in his perfection— [25] has [not] shared in [any] form, **[75]** [1] therefore [he is invisible to] [2] them [all. He has taken]' [3] [no pattern for himself, nor] [4] [is he anything at all of] those [that] [5] [exist among the perfect ones] and [those] [6] [that are unified]. He [is] the [single] one [7] [belonging to the Entirety]. In Existence [8] [is] Being; in [Vitality] [9] <is> Life; and in [10] perfection and [11] [Mentality] is Blessedness. [12] All [these] were existing [13] [in the] indivisibility of [14] [the] Spirit. And it is Mentality [15] on account of [which] is [16] [Divinity] and [Insubstantiality] [17] and Blessedness [18] and Life and [19] Mentality and Goodness. [20] And Henad [21] and Unity, and all these absolutely [22] pre-exist the purity of the ingenerateness. ...

As pointed out in Chapter 9 in the context of the discussion of Alcinous/Albinus' *Didaskalikos*, these negative theologies are excellent examples of the sort of second-century negative theologies to be found both in non-gnostic sources such as the *Didaskalikos* X.3-4 (cited in Chapter 9, p. 382), Aristides' *Apologia* (I.4-5),[6] Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis* (V.12.81.4.1-82.4.1; cited in Chapter 9), Justin, (II *Apol.* 6.1-2), Tatian (*Or. ad Graec.* 4.1), Theophilus (*Ad Autol.* I.3-4) and in the gnostic systems of *Eugnostos the Blessed* (III, 71,18-73,3),[7]

6. *Apologia* 1.5, [p. 57 Alpigiano]: "He is nameless since everything that has a name is similar to a creature. He has neither form nor composition of members, since what possesses these is similar to what is formed. He is neither male nor female, <since the one in whom these are is ruled by passions> (conj. Geffken). He has no adversary, since nothing is stringer than he. The heavens do not encompass him since the heavens and all visible things are encompassed by him. He has no adversary since there is none stronger than he. He has no anger or rage since nothing can rise up against him. He has no error or forgetfulness since he is all wisdom and intelligence."

7. *Eugnostos* **III 71** [18] "For he [19] is immortal and eternal, [20] having no birth; for everyone [21] who has birth will perish. [22] He is unbegotten, having no beginning; [23] for everyone who has a beginning [24] has an end. No one rules **72** [1] over him. He has no name; for whoever has [2] a name is the creation of another. [3] He is unnamable. He has no [4] human form; for whoever has [5] human form is the creation [6] of another. He

and Basilides (ca. 125 CE *apud* Hippolytus *Ref.* VII 20.2-21.1).[8] As stated in Chapter 9, all such negative theologies are Middle Platonic theologico-metaphysical adaptations of the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. Perhaps, as H. A. Wolfson has pointed out, rather than calling these negative theologies, in which an affirmative predicate is negated, perhaps one should rather call them "privative theologies," since they in fact deny the possibility of predication at all.[9]

Among the Platonizing Sethian treatises, *Marsanes* (X 4,19-23; 7,1-29) is exceptional in positing a principle yet more supreme principle than the Invisible Spirit: the unknown "Silent One." Called the foundation or origin (καταρχή) of "indiscriminateness" (cf. ἀδιακρισία), it is completely aloof from all else below it.[10] Its closest analogy seems to be the "altogether ineffable" principle beyond even the Plotinian "absolutely (ἁπλῶς) One" (the source of the noetic triad) in the Neoplatonic

has his own semblance—[7] not like [8] the semblance we have received and seen, [9] but a strange semblance [10] that surpasses all things [11] and is better than the totalities. It looks [12] to every side and sees itself [13] from itself. [14] He is infinite; he is incomprehensible. [15] He is ever imperishable [16] (and) has no likeness (to anything). He is [17] unchanging good. He is [18] faultless. He is everlasting. [19] He is blessed. He is unknowable, [20] while he (nonetheless) knows [21] himself. He is immeasurable. [22] He is untraceable. He is [23] perfect, having no defect. **73** [1] He is imperishably blessed. [2] He is called "Father [3] of the Universe."

8. According to Basilides, the supreme God is a nothing; it cannot even be named ineffable although we call it ineffable (since that would assume there was something to be called ineffable); there was nothing, neither matter nor substance nor non-substantiality; nothing simple or composite or imperceptible; no man, angel or god; nothing perceptible or intelligible; only the non-existent God without intelligence, perception, will, resolve, impulse, or desire: (Hippolytus, *Ref.* VII.21.1,1-5,1: Ἐπεὶ οὖν οὐδὲν ἦν, οὐχ ὕλη, οὐκ οὐσία, οὐκ ἀνούσιον, οὐχ ἁπλοῦν, οὐ σύνθετον, οὐκ ἀσύνθετον, οὐκ ἀναίσθητον, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος, οὐκ ἄγγελος, οὐ θεὸς, οὐδὲ ὅλως τι τῶν ὀνομαζομένων ἢ δι' αἰσθήσεως λαμβανομένων ἢ νοητῶν πραγμάτων, ἀλλ' οὕτω καὶ ἔτι λεπτομερεστέρως πάντων ἁπλῶς περιγεγραμμένων, ὁ οὐκ ὢν θεὸς, ὃν' Αριστοτέλης καλεῖ νόησιν νοήσεως, οὗτοι δὲ οὐκ ὄντα, ἀνοήτως, ἀναισθήτως, ἀβούλως, ἀπροαιρέτως, ἀπαθῶς, ἀνεπιθυμήτως, κόσμον ἠθέλεσε ποιῆσαι. 2. τὸ δὲ ἠθέλησε λέγω, φησί, σημασίας χάριν, ἀθελήτως καὶ ἀνοήτως καὶ ἀναισθήτως ... 4. Οὕτως ὁ οὐκ ὢν θεὸς ἐποίησε κόσμον οὐκ ὄντα ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων, καταβαλόμενος καὶ ὑποστήσας σπέρμα τι ἓν ἔχον πᾶσαν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τὴν τοῦ κόσμου πανσπερμίαν.)

9. H. A. Wolfson, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides," *Harvard Theological Review* 50 (1957), 145-156.

10. Although its "silence" seems to be shared or possessed by the next lower being, the Invisible Spirit, the first of the Triple Powered One's powers, who somehow exists "in" (X 13,15-19) the Unknown Silent One.

metaphysics of Iamblichus and his pupil Theodore of Asine.[11] But unlike Iamblichus' altogether ineffable One, the supreme One of *Marsanes* and Theodore nevertheless has some relation to its posteriors, since for Theodore, the second One was the aspiration ("breathing"), self-contact, and intelligibility of the first One, and for *Marsanes* the Invisible Spirit (which "has no breath," X 15,1-4; 15,29-16,2) seems to share both the silence and the activity of the Unknown Silent One.

As in *Allogenes*, the Invisible Spirit is identified with the first of the Triple Powered One's three powers—apparently named "Hypostasis." In fact, *Marsanes* first introduces the Invisible Spirit as "the insubstantial one who belongs to the first unbegotten one," while at the same time awarding the Invisible Spirit' traditional epithet "Invisible" to the Triple Powered One (X 4,15-16), suggesting the closest possible identification between the two as is generally maintained in *Zostrianos* (which does not distinguish between the Invisible Spirit the Triple Powered One). In this regard, *Marsanes* seems to occupy a median position between *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, although tending more towards *Allogenes*' characterization of the Triple Powered One as an independent being. For the most part, *Marsanes* avoids the term "Invisible Spirit," preferring instead the terms "Unbegotten One" or "Great One." Nevertheless, the Invisible Spirit, identified as the Silent One's activity (ἐνέργεια) and usually characterized as "insubstantial"[12] or "unbegotten," is functionally still the most important of the supreme principles in *Marsanes*. The Invisible Spirit is a "spirit" in the sense of an entity "that does not have breath" (X 15,2-3; 15,29-16,2; by contrast, Theodore's "second one" is the "breath" of the first, cf. the concluding section of Chapter 10).

Although according to most Sethian treatises, the Invisible Spirit is stable and remains in his own place, *Marsanes* imputes a certain motion to him, in the sense that he can "go forth" from and ascend or "run up" to his "place." On pages 9-10, we read:

> **X 9** [29] [Again] the Invisible [Spirit] **10** [1] ran up [2] to his place. The entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm) [3] was revealed, the entire place unfolded [4] <until> he reached the upper region. [5] Again he went forth and caused the [6] entire place to be illuminated, and the entire [7] place was illuminated.

11. For Iamblichus, see Damascius, *De principiis* I.43, 50, 51 (*Dub. et sol.* I.86.3; 103,6-10; 101,14-15 Ruelle); for Theodore, see Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* II.274,10-276,26, cited in Chapter 10.

12. ἀνούσιος; in fact "beyond [insubstantiality]," X 7,24-29; cf. 13,15-19.

And a few lines later:

> **X 10** [19] Upward mounts the Invisible Spirit (ἀόρατον πνεῦμα)! [20] And you (pl.) [21] [yourselves], ascend with him [22] [up above], since you have [23] [the] great [radiant] crown! [24] But on that day [25] you will see [26] [as you hasten to] ascend above [27] [with him].

This kind of ascending and descending would be much more appropriate for the explicitly dynamic figure of the Triple Powered (δύναμις) One. Although *Marsanes* counts the Invisible Spirit and Triple Powered One as separate entities much as can *Allogenes*, the coordination between the Invisible Spirit and the Triple Powered One's first power is so close that the Invisible Spirit can to a certain extent take on the downward-oriented processional (cf. πρόοδος) movement of the Triple Powered One's second power ("Activity" in *Marsanes*, Vitality elsewhere) as well as the upward-oriented reversional (cf. ἐπιστροφή) or contemplative movement of its third power ("Knowledge" or the Barbelo Aeon in *Marsanes*, Mentality or Blessedness elsewhere). This mobile aspect of the Invisible Spirit is in fact an interior "energy" of the Invisible Spirit called the Triple Powered One, who is conceived as a distinct entity, yet whose first power is nevertheless somehow identical with the Invisible Spirit.

B. The Triple Powered One

Thus there seems to be something of a contradiction: the Invisible Spirit is both a supreme principle that is entirely self-sufficient and self-complete, yet in some sense it also gives rise to an entire spiritual realm other than itself. Many of the Sethian treatises attempt to articulate this apparently contradictory aspect of the supreme principle in various ways: in the case of the Platonizing Sethian treatises, this contradiction is resolved by the introduction at the highest level of an entity called the Triple Powered One. Thus *Zostrianos* identifies the Invisible Spirit as the supreme One, who contains within himself an inner triadic structure, namely his Triple Power—Existence, Vitality, and Mentality or Blessedness—as the means through which all subsequent reality is derived, while the *Three Steles of Seth* apparently identifies this triad with both the prefigurative and actual existence of Barbelo. On the other hand, *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* often mention this triad as if it constituted a distinct quasi-hypostasis immediately subjacent to the Invisible Spirit, who is identified as—or even, as in *Marsanes*, distinguished from—the

supreme Unknowable One.[13] This ambiguity in the name for the supreme principle probably results from the melding of two somewhat incompatible traditional designations for the supreme deity, who for Sethianism is the Invisible Spirit and for Platonism is the One. From a traditional Sethian point of view the two terms are interchangeable, while for Platonists, the materialistic associations of the term "Spirit" in Stoic philosophy would disqualify its use as a simple equivalent to the supreme One beyond all being and corporeality. Furthermore, as we shall see in Chapter 16, the ambiguities and variations in the in the ontological rank—but not the function—of the Triple Powered One—whether identical with the One or with the Invisible Spirit or with the Barbelo Aeon—could be explained by postulating the dependence of these treatises on the doctrine of the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* discussed in Chapter 9, with its subtle distinctions between the First One, the prefigurative existence of the Second One in the First, and the resultant determinate being of the Second as "another" One, as well as its notion of a First One beyond being who nevertheless "contains" the prefigurative infinitival being (εἶναι) of the Second One that becomes defined as fully determinate Being (ὄν) and Intellect.

As the entity that mediates between the Unknowable One/Invisible Spirit and the Aeon of Barbelo, the Triple Powered One is the most distinctive metaphysical innovation of the Platonizing Sethian treatises. As stated above, ten of fourteen times in *Allogenes* and at least once in *Marsanes*, the Triple-Powered One is treated as an distinctive entity immediately below the Invisible Spirit; it is the potency (δύναμις) of the Unknown One or Invisible Spirit by which he unfolds himself into the world of Being and Intellect which he himself altogether transcends. According to *Allogenes*, it consists of three modalities or phases: "That-

13. The Invisible Spirit and the Triple Powered One are mentioned sometimes separately (*Zost.* VIII 15,18; 17,7; 24,9-10; 93,6-9; 124,3-4; *Allogenes* XI 45,13-30; 52,19; 52,30-33; 53,30; 55,21; 61,6.13.20.34 and *Marsanes* X 4,13-19; 6,19; 8,11; 9,25; 14,22-23; 15,1-3); sometimes as identical with or in close conjunction with the Invisible Spirit (*Zost.* VIII 20,15-18; 24,12-13; 63,7-8; 74,3-16; 79,16-23; 80,11-20; 87,13-14; 97,2-3; 118,11-12; 123,19-20; 128,20-21; *Allogenes* XI 47,8-9, 51,8-9; 58,25; 66,33-34; *Steles Seth* VII 121,31-32; *Marsanes* X 7,16-17 [the "activity" of the Invisible Spirit]; 7,27-29; 8,5-7), often as "the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit" or "the invisible spiritual Triple Powered One"; and sometimes in conjunction with Barbelo (*Steles Seth* VII 120,21-22; 121,32-33; 123,18-30; *Marsanes* X 8,19-20; 9,7-20; 10,8-11). As the activity of the Invisible Spirit, the Triple Powered One is perhaps identical with all three in *Marsanes* X 7,1-9,29.

which-is" (ⲡⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ or ⲡⲏ ⲉⲧⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲡⲉ, perhaps translating either Essentiality, ὀντότης, or Substantiality, οὐσιότης), Vitality (ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲱⲛϩ), and Mentality (ⲧⲛⲟⲏⲧⲏⲥ, ⲧⲙⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲓⲙⲉ), an arrangement very similar to that in Proclus' *Elements of Theology* prop. 103,[14] although the *Elements* is a much later work than *Allogenes* on any reading:

Allogenes XI 49,26-37	Proclus, *Elem. theol.* 103:
XI 49 [26] He is Vitality and [27] Mentality and Essentiality.[28]	
Thus Essentiality [29] constantly includes its [30] Vitality and Mentality, [31] and {Life has} [32] Vitality includes [33] {non-} Substantiality and [34] Mentality; Mentality includes [35] Life and Essentiality. [36] And the three are one, [37] although individually they are three.	For in Being (τὸ ὄν) there is Life and Intellect, and in Life there is Being (εἶναι) and Intellection (νοεῖν), and in Intellect there is Being (εἶναι) and Living (ζῆν).

No particular hierarchical order of these terms is specified in *Allogenes* XI 49,26-38, since each single term includes the other two in cyclical permutations. But in the narrative of Allogenes' ascent through the levels of the Triple Powered One (XI 58,26-61,22), one finds the descending hierarchical order Existence (ὕπαρξις), Vitality and Blessedness ("Blessedness" is equivalent to "Mentality" in *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, and in Marius Victorinus), while in XI 61,32-39 one finds the order Life, Mind, and Existence (and nonexistence!).

In Chapter 10 it was noted that the order of terms comprising the Being-Life-Mind triad resident in the Plotinian Intellect is somewhat variable, perhaps depending on whether Plotinus was emphasizing Intellect's relation to Soul (Being-Mind-Life) or Intellect's relation to the One (Being-Life-Mind). Be that as it may, among most Neoplatonists—but not Theodore—from Iamblichus onward, the sequence Being, Life, and Mind as found in Plotinus' earlier treatises became the canonical form of this triad, even though the non-canonical sequence Being-Mind-Life was often used by Plotinus in and after his antignostic *Großschrift*.[15] As just noted, a similar variability occurs in the triadic Existence-Vitality-Mentality (or Existence-Vitality-Blessedness) nomenclature for the three powers of the Triple Powered One found in the Platonizing Sethian treatises. The *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 124,25-34; 125,28-32) consistently maintains the canonical Existence-Vitality-Mentality order. In *Allogenes* there is a brief instance of the non-canonical order (Vitality, Mentality, Essentiality in XI 49,26-27 but followed immediately by the canonical order!), although everywhere else one finds canonical order (XI 59,9-60,35; 61,32-39). In its own description of the epistemological powers of the baptismal waters, *Zostrianos* (VIII 13,27-18,4) uses the non-canonical order Being-Mind-Life or Existence-Blessedness-Life (perhaps because he coordinates these with the figures of Kalyptos-ideas, Protophanes-Intellect, and Autogenes-souls within the Aeon of Barbelo), but then it also uses the canonical order Existence-Life-Blessedness (VIII 19,16-21,1; 64,13-75,21 + 80,10-25) when the author draws upon the material he shares in common with Marius Victorinus (*Adversus Arium* I.49,9-50,21), which seems to derive from some kind of epitome or commentary on the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. In the extant remains of *Marsanes* there is no explicit mention of this triad at all, and it appears that a new nomenclature, Hypostasis, Activity, and Knowledge (ὑπόστασις, ἐνέργεια, and γνῶσις, although in X 9,16-20 this triad is listed in the apparently illogical order γνῶσις, ὑπόστασις, and ἐνέργεια) is used to designate the three powers of the Triple Powered One.

In *Allogenes*, the Triple-Powered One is said to be the delimiter of the boundlessness subsisting in the Invisible Spirit. As an initially *un-*

14. Proclus *Elem. theol.* 103 [p. 92, 13-14 Dodds] καὶ γὰρ ἐν τῷ ὄντι καὶ ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ νοῦς καὶ ἐν τῇ ζωῇ τὸ ειναι καὶ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ ἐν τῷ νῷ τὸ ἔιναι καὶ τὸ ζῆν.

15. For Plotinus generally, one might especially expect the order Being-Mind-Life, mainly because the last term naturally points downward to the fundamental Life principle of his system, the immediately subjacent hypostasis of Soul e.g., *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6,14-19 and III, 6 [26] 6,21-28. In the treatise *On Numbers* that directly follows the *Großschrift*, Plotinus tends to change the order of the Being-Life-Mind triad that dominates the structure of the divine Intellect in the earlier treatises to the Being-Mind-Life order earlier implicit in Numenius and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, apparently on the grounds that the truly living being, "that which has life," represents a more diverse multiplicity than do being and mind, e.g., VI, 6 [34] 8,17-22: "First, then, we take Being as first in order; then Mind, then that which has Life, for this appears already to "contain all things" (*Timaeus* 31A4), and Mind, as the act of Being, is second. Thus it is clear that numbers cannot depend upon that which has Life, since unity and duality existed before that, nor would it depend on mind, as before that was being, which is both one and many."

bounded entity, the Triple-Powered One emerges from its source in the Invisible Spirit as a processing boundlessness that turns itself back to its source in an act of objectifying self-knowledge; becoming stable and bounded, it takes on form and definition as Barbelo, the self knowledge or Mind of the Invisible Spirit (XI 49,5-26):[16]

> **XI 49** [5] He is endowed with [6] [Blessedness] and [7] Goodness, because when he [8] is intelligized as the Delimiter (D) [9] of the Boundlessness (B) of the [10] Invisible Spirit (IS) [that subsists] in him (D), [11] it (B) causes [him (D)] to revert to [it (IS)] [12] in order that it (B) might know what it is [13] that is within it (IS) and [14] how it (IS) exists, and [15] that he (D) might guarantee the endurance of [16] everything by being a [17] cause for those who truly exist. [18] For through him (D) [19] knowledge of it (IS) became available, [20] since he (D) is the one who knows what [21] it (IS; or he, D?) is. But they brought forth nothing [22] [beyond] themselves, neither [23] power nor rank nor [24] glory nor aeon, [25] for they are all [26] eternal.

Here, thought appears as the movement of an indeterminate boundlessness: by reverting to the Spirit and to itself (the reference in the text appears to be ambiguous), the Second One comes to know the content of the First One: Intellect and true being emerge as indeterminate boundlessness achieves distinctiveness and determination by knowing its own prefigurative existence as the Invisible Spirit's inner content. A similar notion occurs in *Zostrianos* (VIII 16,2-15; cf. 17,20-22):

> **VIII 16** [2] Not only [did they dwell] [3] in thought, but he [made room for] [4] them, since he is [Being] in the following [5] way: he set a [limit] upon [6] Being, lest it become [7] endless and formless; [8] yet it was truly delimited while it was a [9] new entity in order that [it] might become [10] something having [11] its own [dwelling], [12] Existence together with [Being], [13] standing with it, existing with it, [14] surrounding it, [and being like it] [15] on every side.

Alternatively, in *Allogenes* (XI 45,17-30), the Aeon of Barbelo emerges through the Triple-Powered One of the Invisible Spirit by a process of contraction, expansion, and completion through the contemplation of its source; in this way the Barbelo Aeon encompasses both the dyadic function of indefinite extension and the monadic function of limitation:[17]

> **XI 45** [15] the [16] eternal [light of] the knowledge [17] that has [appeared], the [18] male virginal [glory], [19] [the first] aeon, the one from [20] [a] unique triple-powered [aeon], [21] [the] Triple-Powered One who [22] [truly exists]. For after it (the Barbelo Aeon) [contracted], [23] [it expanded] and [24] [spread out] and became complete, [25] [and] it was empowered [with] [26] all of them, by knowing [itself] [27] [in the perfect Invisible Spirit]. [28] And it [became] [29] [an] aeon who knows [herself] [30] [because] she knew that one.

Towards the end of *Allogenes*, it appears that the Barbelo Aeon is characterized as a "shadow" or projected image (cf. the *Three Steles of Seth* VII 122,7 cited below, and Moderatus, *apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.231:4–5 Diels cited in Chapter 9, p. 363) of the eternal Life emerging from the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit, who seems to be distinguished from the supreme "standing" One:

> **XI 66** [30] From [31] the One who constantly stands, [32] there appeared [33] an eternal Life, [34] the Invisible and Triple-powered Spirit, [35] the One among all those who exist, and it surrounds [36] them all, [37] transcending [38] them all. A shadow [....]

The corresponding account of Barbelo's emanation on pages 76-84 of *Zostrianos* reflects the same sequence of procession, reversion and acquisition of separateness and stability; having emanated from the Invisible Spirit, her further descent and potential dispersion is halted by a contemplative reversion upon her source. She comes to stand outside him, examining him and herself, becoming separate and stable as an all-perfect (παντέλιος) being, the ingenerate Kalyptos. In *Zostrianos*, Barbelo emanates directly from the Invisible Spirit who is himself triple powered; here the Triple Powered One seems to lack the independent quasi-hypostatic status it appears to have in *Allogenes* and perhaps *Marsanes*.

> **VIII 76** [7] It is a [power that] [8] inhabits a [part of the] [9] ingenerateness, for it [10] always exists. It [sought] [11] after him, seeing him [there] [12] and existing

16. Translating ⲣⲉϥⲭⲓⲟⲟⲣ as "delimiter" (<* διαπεραίνω) rather than "traverser" (< διαπεράω). There is a certain obscurity in tracing the precise antecedents of the pronoun subjects and objects: compare the accounts in *Zostrianos* VIII 76,7-19: 78,10-81,20: the *Three Steles of Seth* VII 121,20-122,18 and *Marsanes* X 8,18-9,28, as well as the *Apocryphon of John II* 4,19-32 (cited above, p. 500).

17. Cf. Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, 224:34 Rehm: κατὰ γὰρ ἔκτασιν καὶ συστολὴν ἡ μονὰς δυὰς εἶναι νομίζεται; cf. *ibid.*, 234:18 ἀπ' αὐτοῦ εἰς ἄπειρον ἔκτασιν and Sophia in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.3,3: ἐκτεινομένης αὐτῆς καὶ εἰς ἄπειρον ῥεούσης τῆς οὐσίας; cf. I.2.2. In Christian trinitarian theology the Sabellians and Marcellus of Ancyra explain how, by extension and spreading out (πλατύνειν), God is a Triad as well as a Monad; cf. Athanasius, *Adv. Arium* IV.13.

as a simple [unity]. [13] Since he is [14] blessedness in [15] perfection, he [was] [16] a perfect and [blessed] unity. [17] She lacks this one's (character) [18] because she lacked his [unity], [19] since it would come later [20] with knowledge. And [21] his knowledge dwells [22] outside of him with [23] that which contemplates him [24] inwardly.

VIII 77 [12] She became distinct [13] because she is [an] all-perfect instance [14] [of] perfection [15] existing as contemplation. [16]

VIII 78 [6] It is (s)he who knows] [7] and [who foreknows] [8] him(herself), [truly existing] [9] as a [single] aeon [10] in act [and] [11] potency and [Existence]. [12] It is not [in] [13] time that she originated, but [she] [14] [appeared] eternally, [15] having eternally stood [16] in his presence. [17] She was overshadowed by the [18] majesty of his [goodness]. [19] She stood [20] looking at him and rejoicing. [21] Being filled with [22] goodness [she did not become separate]. [23] But when she was [filled] **79** [1] [...] ... [...] [2] [...] ... [...] [3] [...] ... [...] [4] [...] ... [of the glories]. [5] [And she is an insubstantial Existence] [6] [and a power] that [truly exists]. [7] [She is the] first [insubstantial] [8] Existence [after] [9] that one. [10]

[And from] the undivided one toward [11] existence in act [12] move the [intellectual] perfection [13] and intellectual life [14] that were [15] blessedness and [16] divinity. The [entire] Spirit, [17] perfect, simple [18] and invisible, [19] [has] become a unity [20] in existence and [21] act, even a [22] simple Triple [Powered] One, [23] an Invisible Spirit, an [24] image of the one that [25] truly exists, the one **80** [1] [...] [2] [...] ... [...] [3] [...] able [...] [4] [...] [5] [... It is impossible to comprehend] [6] true [existence] [7] since it is her [source], [8] while she is an image. [She began to] [9] strive, since it was [im]possible [10] to unite with his [image]. [11] She saw his [privation] [12] while it was [next to] [13] his all-perfection, [14] since he [15] pre-exists and [16] is situated over all these, [17] pre-existing, being known [18] as three-powered.

VIII 81[6] She [was] existing [individually] [7] [as cause] of [the declination]. [8] Lest she come forth anymore [9] or get further away [10] from perfection, she [11] knew herself and him (the Spirit), [12] and she stood at rest [13] and spread forth [14] on his [behalf]— [15] since she derived [16] [from] true existence, [17] she derived from that which [18] truly exists in common with all [19] things—to know herself [20] and the one that pre-exists. [21]

Having supplemented him, [22] they came into existence. {they [23] came into existence} And [24] they are manifest through those **82**[1] [who pre-]exist. And [2] [...] through the [...] [3] [...] having appeared [4] [as a] second [5] [Mentality]. And they appeared [6] [through the one (Barbelo)] who [7] foreknows him, being [8] an eternal space, [9] having become [10] a secondary form of his knowledge, [11] even the duplication of [12] his knowledge, the ingenerate [13] Kalyptos. And [the] [14] truly existent ones also [15] stood at rest upon it (Kalyptos), [16] for she accordingly recognized him [17] in order that those following [18] her might come into being having [19] a place, and that [20] those that

come forth [21] might not precede her but [22] might become holy [23] and simple. She is the [24] introspection of the god **83** [1] who pre-[exists].

83 [8] She was called [9] Barbelo by virtue of [10] thought, the [11] perfect virginal male of three [12] kinds. And it is her own knowledge [13] through which she originated [14] lest [15] [she be drawn] down and [16] come forth further [17] by the things that exist [18] in her and that follow [19] her. Rather, she is [20] simple in order that she might [21] be able to know the god [22] who pre-exists, since [23] she became better than [24] those when she [25] [revealed her product] **84** [1] ingenerate[ly]. [2]

[And she became a] third [3] [aeon. There are] two [differences] [4] [in form] among [aeons], [5] [and they differ in this] [6] [way: On the one hand she is a first] [7] [aeon], with the [second] [8] ingenerate [nature], [9] a second [image]. [10] She stood at rest [as the] [11] first one of that [which] [12] truly exists. In [another way] [13] [she is] truly the Blessedness [14] of the Invisible [Spirit] ...

In VIII 79,5-9, Barbelo is the "first [insubstantial] existence" after the Invisible Spirit that emanates from the undivided Spirit to the level of Existence. Unlike the Spirit, she is an activity (ἐνέργεια), and at the level of Existence she becomes a Triple-Powered One as "an image of the one that truly exists." As the moving image and activity of the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit, Barbelo can herself be called a "Triple Powered One" whose Triple Power is actualized in the triad of Kalyptos (Existence), Protophanes (Blessedness), and Autogenes (Life); the Triple Power potentially present in the Invisible Spirit is actualized through Barbelo.

In *The Three Steles of Seth* (VII 125,25-32), the pre-existent One is identical with the Invisible Spirit. In VII 121,20-124,14, Barbelo is said to pre-exist in the pre-existent Monad / Father as a Triple Powered One who was the first to see the pre-existent One. She emerges from her source as the first "shadow" (cf. *Allogenes* XI 66,30-38 cited above) of light from the light of the Father, as a Hidden One (καλυπτός) who has become numerable, that is, measurable, a defined Being that can be distinguished from the Monad, her source. Just as the Neopythagorean arithmological treatises consider the Triad to be the first of the defined numbers following the One and the Dyad, Barbelo is said to become three-fold (cf. "Triple Male") while at the same time continuing to be one with her source. She is a Monad from a Monad. Note that Barbelo is herself a triple powered one who derives from the pre-existent Triple Powered One; in this case the supreme One's triple power is Barbelo

herself existing prefiguratively or potentially within the supreme One or "living Spirit."

> **VII 121** [30] O non-substantial One [31] from an undivided, [32] triple-[powered] One, You are a threefold [33] power! You are [a] great monad [34] from [a] pure monad! **122** [1] You are a superior monad, the [2] first projected image of the holy Father, [3] light from light. [4] We bless you, [5] generator of perfection, aeon-giver! [6] You yourself have seen the [7] eternal ones, that they are from a shadow (i.e., a projected image). [8] You have become numerable. And [9] you have arisen and remained [10] One, while yet being a cause of multiplicity in order to become divided. You are [11] truly replicated [12] threefold! You are a One [13] of the One. And you are from [14] its shadow. You are a Kalyptos (i.e., hidden one), [15] you are a universe of knowledge. [16] For you know those of the One, that they [17] derive from a shadow. And these [18] are yours in thought: on account of [19] these you have empowered the eternal ones [20] with Substantiality; you have empowered [21] Divinity with Vitality; [22] you have empowered Mentality with [23] Goodness; with [24] Blessedness you have empowered the [25] shadows that flow from the One. [26] One you have empowered with Mentality; [27] another you have empowered with quality (<* ποιότης for ποίησις = ⲦⲀⲘⲒⲞ, creation). [28] You have empowered that which is equal [29] and that which is unequal, the [30] similar and the dissimilar. [31] With generation and intelligible [32] Forms you have empowered [33] others with Being. You have flourished [34] with generation!

> **VII 123** [18] Because of you is [19] Life: from you comes Life. [20] Because of you is Intellect: from [21] you comes Intellect. You are Intellect: [22] you are a universe of truth. [23] You are a triple power: you are [24] a threefold; Truly, you are [25] thrice replicated, O aeon of [26] aeons! It is you alone [27] who purely behold the [28] eternally primal and those which are unengendered: [29] but also the first divisions, according as [30] you have been divided. (trans. Layton)

We have noted that *Marsanes* (X 7,4-10,7) posits an Unknown Silent One above the Invisible Spirit, who—in *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and earlier Sethian treatises—is usually the supreme principle. Below this One come the Invisible Spirit and the Triple Powered One, who seem to be virtually indistinguishable, since *Marsanes* tends to collapse the eleventh and twelfth "seals" together and applies the epithet "Invisible"—normally reserved for the Spirit—to the Triple Powered One, and then identifies the Spirit in terms of the first of the Triple Powered One's three powers:

> **X 4** [13] [The eleventh] and [the] [14] [twelfth] speak of the [15] Invisible One (*aoratos*) who possesses [16] three powers (*dynamis*) [17] and the insubstantial (*-ousia*) Spirit (*pneuma*) [18] who belongs to [19] the first unbegotten one (of the Triple Powered One's three powers).

As the "activity" of the supreme Unknown Silent One, the Invisible Spirit shares also in its silence, whose actualization is in turn the Triple Powered One, the activity of the Invisible Spirit, who is thus the first of its first "powers." The Aeon of Barbelo then emerges as the third power of the Triple Powered One as it withdraws from its first two powers, the Invisible Spirit as its initial phase, and the pre-existent otherness of its median phase that characterizes the actual nature of the Triple Powered One itself; these two phases, apparently called Hypostasis and Activity (X 9,16-20), are *Marsanes*' equivalent for the Existence and Vitality powers of the Triple Powered One in the other treatises, while the Barbelo Aeon would coincide with its third power "Knowledge," which in the other treatises is called Mentality.[18]

> **X 7** [1] When I had inquired about these things [2] I perceived that he (the Triple Powered One) acted (ἐνεργεῖν) [3] from silence. He exists [4] prior to those that [5] truly exist, that belong to the realm of Being. [6] He (the Triple Powered One) is a pre-existent otherness [7] belonging to the one (the Invisible Spirit) that [8] actualizes (ἐνεργεῖν) the Silent One. [9] And the silence of [that (the Triple Powered One) which follows] [10] him (the Invisible Spirit) acts (ἐνεργεῖν). For [so] [11] [long as] the latter (the Spirit) [acts (ἐνεργεῖν)], [12] the former (the Triple Powered One) [acts also]. [13] The [silence which belongs to the Un-] [14] begotten One (the Invisible Spirit) is among [the aeons, and from] [15] the beginning he is in-[substantial (οὐσία)]. [16] But the activity (ἐνέργεια) of [17] that One (the Invisible Spirit) <is> the Triple Powered One. [18] The Unbegotten One (the Invisible Spirit) is prior to [19] the Aeon, since he is in-[substantial]. [20] And as for the summit of the [21] silence of the Silent One, [22] it is possible for the summit (i.e., the Invisible Spirit)

18. As in the case of the sun giving off light, for Plotinus (V, 1 [10] 6.28-35; V, 3 [49] 12.39-44) each substance (e.g. fire)—as well as the supreme One—has a primary, internal activity *of* (proper to or identical with) itself whose internal completeness *necessarily* gives rise to a secondary activity (e.g. heat) external to (i.e., *in* something else) and different *from* itself (the primary activity). A product is neither completely separate from nor identical with its source, but remains (μονή) in the source as that primary activity (For Aristotle, an agent's activity is not "cut off, but is *of* something *in* something else," *Physics* 202b7-8). In *Marsanes*, the internal activity of the Unknown Silent One is the Invisible Spirit, whose secondary activity is the Triple Powered One, who remains in the Invisible Spirit as a primary activity, but—in its median phase—as an "otherness" different from that "withdraws" or "exists outside" the Spirit as his knowledge, "separated from the male," yet "belonging to" him.

[23] of the energy of the Triple [24] Powered One to behold it. And the One (the Unknown Silent One) who [25] exists, who is silent, [who is] [26] beyond [insubstantiality], [27] manifested [the Triple] [28] [Powered, First-] [29] Perfect One. ...

X 8 [18] When the third [19] power (i.e. the Barbelo Aeon) of the Triple Powered One [20] contemplated (νοεῖν) him (the Triple Powered One), [21] it said to me, "Be silent [22] lest you should know and flee [23] and come before me. But [24] know (νοεῖν) that this One was [25] [silent], and concentrate on understanding (νόημα). [26] For [the power (δύναμις) still] keeps [27] [guiding] me into [28] [the Aeon which] is Barbelo, [29] [the] male [Virgin]."

X 9 [1] For this reason the [2] Virgin became male (as νοῦς, the Aeon of Barbelo), [3] because she had separated from the male (i.e., the Invisible Spirit). The [4] Knowledge (γνῶσις) stood outside of him, [5] as if belonging to him. [6] And she who exists is she who sought. [7] She is situated just as [8] the Triple Powered One is situated. [9] She withdrew (ἀναχωρεῖν) [10] from [these] two [powers] (the first two powers of the Triple Powered One), [11] since she exists [outside of] [12] the Great One (the Invisible Spirit), [seeing what] [13] is above [her, the Perfect One (the Triple Powered One)] [14] who is silent, [who has] [15] this [commandment] [16] to be silent. His knowledge (γνῶσις ~ mind) [17] and his hypostasis (ὑπόστασις ~ existence) [18] and his activity (ἐνέργεια ~ life) [19] are those things that the power (δύναμις, i.e. Barbelo) [20] of the Triple Powered One expressed.

According to these passages, the Invisible Spirit is both the silence and the actualizer of the supreme Unknown Silent One, while the Triple Powered One is the preexistent otherness of the Invisible Spirit that proceeds forth to become the Aeon (of Barbelo). *Marsanes* names the three phases of the triple Powered One, not by the abstract Existence-Vitality-Mentality nomenclature, but as its "powers" (perhaps called Hypostasis, Activity, and Knowledge instead of the Existence, Vitality and Mentality of the other treatises): The first power is the Invisible Spirit identified as the insubstantial silence of the Silent One, the second power is the Triple Powered One itself in its capacity as a pre-existent otherness proceeding from the Invisible Spirit, and the third power is the dynamic equivalent of the Barbelo Aeon. The "powers" of the Triple Powered one have become identified with entities that can be distinguished as the twelfth, eleventh, and tenth "seals" or hypostases of *Marsanes*' metaphysical hierarchy. Thus the Triple Power remains a separate hypostasis *qua* its median phase, but its first and third powers are tightly coordinated—if not identical—with the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo respectively.

The statement in X 8,18-29, "when the third power of the Triple Powered One contemplated (νοεῖν) him, it said to me" appears to be uttered by the third, intelligizing, power of the Triple Powered One telling Marsanes how its own prefigurative self continually becomes its hypostatized, actualized self, the Aeon of Barbelo: "[the power (δύναμις) still] keeps [guiding] me (ⲉⲥⲭⲓ ⲙ]ⲁⲉⲓⲧ ϩⲏⲧ· ⲁϩⲟ[ⲩⲛ ⲁ-], perhaps for προοδεύειν cf. πρόοδος) into [the Aeon which] is Barbelo." This causes the dyadic female Virgin to become male (probably a triad), divided from the male (the Invisible Spirit) and stand outside of him as his Knowledge (γνῶσις).

While certain Pythagoreans conceived the Monad to "withdraw from its nature and wander into the condition of the (indeterminate) Dyad" ("*recedente a naturu sua singularitate*," Numenius, frg. 52.18 des Places), in the concluding passage from *Marsanes* (X 9,1-28), Barbelo reverses the process, achieving *determination* by withdrawing from "[these] two powers," and comes to stand apart from the Great One, "[seeing what] is above [her, the Perfect One] who is silent." These two powers would be the Invisible Spirit (the Great One), coterminous with the first power of the Triple Powered One, and the Triple Powered One itself ("[the Perfect One] who is silent"), as its second power, the hypostatization of its own indeterminate median phase of pure activity. As the Triple Powered One's emanative product, Barbelo is the expression of "his knowledge and his hypostasis and his activity," which may be *Marsanes*' equivalent terminology—but in an arbitrary order—for the Existence-Vitality-Mentality emanative triad of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*.[19] By becoming an aeon—a masculine entity—separate from her ultimate masculine source (the Invisible Spirit), *Marsanes* can say that her—feminine—prefigurative self as the processing activity or median phase of the Triple Powered One has become masculinized: the (feminine) "Virgin" has "become male" (X 9,2).

An instructive parallel is offered by Victorinus in his account of the procession and withdrawal of the Son from the Father (*Adversus Arium* I.51,19-43 Henri-Hadot):[20]

19. Thus ὑπόστασις would be the equivalent for ὕπαρξις, ἐνέργεια would be the equivalent of ζωότης, and γνῶσις would be the equivalent of νοήτης.

20. *Ista igitur | exsistentia totius exsistentiae, est vita, et iuxta quod vita | motus, quasi femineam sortita est potentiam, hoc quod con- | cupivit vivificare. Sed quoniam, sicut demonstratum, ista | motio, una cum sit, et vita est et sapientia, vita*

Marsanes X 9,1-20

X 9 [1] For this reason the [2] Virgin became male (as νοῦς, the Aeon of Barbelo), [3] because she had separated from the male (i.e., the Invisible Spirit). The [4] Knowledge (γνῶσις) stood outside of him, [5] as if belonging to him. [6] And she who exists is she who sought. [7] She is situated just as [8] the Triple Powered One is situated. [9] She withdrew (ἀναχωρεῖν) [10] from [these] two [powers] (the first two powers of the Triple Powered One), [11] since she exists [outside of] [12] the Great One (the Invisible Spirit), [seeing what] [13] is above [her, the Perfect One (the Triple Powered One)] [14] who is silent, [who has] [15] this [commandment] [16] to be silent. His knowledge (γνῶσις) [17] and his hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) [18] and his activity (ἐνέργεια) [19] are those things that the power (δύναμις, i.e. Barbelo) [20] of the Triple Powered One expressed.

Adversus Arium I.51,19-38

51 [19] Life is thus this [20] Existence of all existence, and insofar as life is [21] movement, it has received a sort of feminine power, that which [22] desires to vivify. But since, as was to be shown, this motion, [23] being one, is both Life and Wisdom, Life—returning [24] to Wisdom, or rather to the paternal existence, [25] or even better, made virile [26] by a retrograde movement to the paternal power—Life hastening back to the Father has been made male. [27] For life is descent and Wisdom is ascent. It is also Spirit; [28] the two are thus Spirit, two in one. And likewise Life: at first nothing other than [29] primal Existence, it was necessarily first invested with a virginal [30] potential to be subsequently engendered as the male [31] Son of God by male birth from the Virgin—since in the first motion, i.e., when it first [32] appears, Life initially withdraws from the Father's power and, by its innate [33] desire to vivify and without ceasing to be interior, [34] tends outward by its own movement and thereupon [35] reverts upon itself and, having been turned back toward itself, enters its paternal [36]

conversa | in sapientiam et magis in exsistentiam patricam, magis au- | tem retro motae motionis, in patricam potentiam, et ab | ipso virificata, vita, recurrens in patrem, vir effecta est. | Descensio enim vita, ascensio sapientia. Spiritus autem et | ista, spiritus igitur utraque, in uno duo. Et sicut, exsistene | vita prima exsistentia, necessitas fuit in virginalem poten- | tiam subintrare et, masculari virginis partu, virum generari | filium dei—in prima enim motione, primam dico in appa- | rentiam venientem, veluti defecit a potentia patris et, in | cupiditate insita ad vivefaciendum, intus quidem exsistens | vita, motione autem foris exsistens, in semet ipsam recu- | currit, rursus in semet ipsam conversa, venit in suam patri- | cam exsistentiam, vir effecta et, perfecta in omnipotentem | virtutem, effectus est perfectus spiritus, nutu in superiora | converso, hoc est intro (sic, secundum typum, oportuit | ordinem esse et cum est in corpore spiritus, hoc est filio | Christo et quasi deminutionem pati et a virgine nasci et, | in ipsa veluti deminutione sua, patrica virtute, hoc est exsis- | tentia diviniore et prima, resurgere et renovari et reverti | in patrem, hoc est in exsistentiam et potentiam patricam).

Existence and becomes male. Completed by its all-powerful [37] excellence, life has become perfect Spirit by [38] reversion toward the higher, i.e., toward the interior away from its downward tendency.

Thus, while *Marsanes* jettisons the nomenclature of the Existence-Vitality-Mentality triad of *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, the emanative phases represented by this triad are still designated by the terms established in the previous Platonizing Sethian treatises: the Invisible Spirit, the Triple Powered One, and Barbelo. At this point in *Marsanes*, the content and sublevels of the Barbelo Aeon (Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes) are not at all in view.

In *Allogenes*, the Triple Powered One is the paradigmatic, "non-being (pre-) existence" of the Barbelo Aeon resident potentially within the supreme Unknowable One or Invisible Spirit. As Existence, Essentiality or Substantiality, it is preexistent within its source, the supreme One, and as Mentality it is identical with its self-objectified manifestation, Barbelo. While the initial and final phases or modes of the Triple Powered One have hypostatic instantiation as the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo, the ontological status of the transitional mode between the two, Vitality, is less clear. In *Zostrianos*, the Triple Powered One mostly seems to be a faculty of the Invisible Spirit itself and in the *Three Steles of Seth* it seems to be identified with Barbelo herself. In both *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*, the Triple Powered One seems to be a sort of quasi-hypostasis between the supreme One and the Barbelo Aeon, as if it were the hypostatic instantiation of its processing activity or median power, Vitality. According to *Allogenes* XI 66,25-38, the nonexistent and inert Unknown One, identical with the Invisible Spirit proper, even though potentially containing all else within itself, gives forth nothing of itself. The actual source of the subjacent realm of Being is a distinct entity, the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit, which appears as an Eternal Life out of its own inertness:

XI 66 [25] Since [26] he is boundless and powerless [27] and nonexistent, he was not providing [28] Being. Rather he contains [29] all of these in himself, being at rest, [30] (and) standing. From [31] the One who constantly stands, [32] there appeared [33] an eternal Life, [34] the Invisible and Triple-powered Spirit, [35] the one among all those who exist, and it surrounds [36] them all, [37] transcending [38] them all.

The closest attested non-Sethian parallel to this sequence of emanative phases is apparently to be found in the anonymous Turin palimpsest *Commentary on the Parmenides* published by W. Kroll in 1892. As discussed in Chapter 9, P. Hadot has attributed this commentary to Porphyry's authorship, but other scholars, especially K. Corrigan and G. Bechtle have argued that it is more likely pre-Plotinian and Middleplatonic.[21] According to this commentary, there are two "Ones," a first One whom the *Parmenides*' first hypothesis describes as altogether beyond the realm of determinate being, and a second One, the prototype of all true, determinate being and the "One-Being" of the second *Parmenidean* hypothesis. The second One, which is also conceived as a divine Intellect, is said to originate by unfolding from the absolute infinitival existence of the supreme One in three phases or modalities in which each modality of the Intellect predominates at a given phase. First, as a pure infinitival Existence (εἶναι or ὕπαρξις), Intellect is a purely potential Intellect identical with its prefiguration in the absolute being of the supreme first One. In the final phase, it has become identical with the determinate or participial being (τὸ ὄν) of Intellect proper, the second hypostasis; it has now become the hypostatic exemplification of its idea, the absolute being (τὸ εἶναι) of the One. The transitional phase between the first and final phases of Intellect in effect constitutes a median phase in which Intellect proceeds forth from the first One as an indeterminate Life:

> Taken in itself as its own idea it—this power, or whatever term one might use to indicate its ineffability and inconceivability [i.e., the potential Intellect still identical with the One]—is one and simple. But with respect to existence (ὕπαρξις), life (ζωή) and thought (νόησις) it is neither one nor simple. With respect to existence (ὕπαρξις), thinking is also being thought. But when Intellect [abandons] existence for intelligizing so as to be elevated to the rank of an intelligible in order to see its (prefigurative) self, intelligizing is life. Therefore thinking is indeterminate with respect to life. And all are activities (ἐνεργείαι) such that with respect to existence, activity would be static; with respect to intelligizing, activity would be turning to itself; and with respect to life, activity would be inclining away from existence (*In Parmenidem* XIV, 10-26 Hadot 2:110-112; Greek text cited in Chapter 9).

21. See W. KROLL, "Ein neuplatonischer Parmenides-kommentar in einem Turiner Palimpsest," *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* 47 (1892), 599-627; cf. P. HADOT, "Fragments d'un commentaire de Porphyre sur le Parménide," *Revue des Études Grecques* 74 (1961), 410-438; *IDEM*, "Être, Vie, Pensée chez Plotin et avant Plotin," in *Les sources de Plotin* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique V; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), 107-157, and *IDEM*, *Porphyre et Victorinus* (2 vols., Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1968), 2.64-113, and *contra*, K. CORRIGAN, "Platonism and Gnosticism. The Anonymous *Commentary on the Parmenides:* Middle or Neoplatonic?," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 141-177, and G. BECHTLE, *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Berner Reihe philosophischer Studien 22; Bern: Verlag Paul Haupt, 1999). For further literature, see Chapter 9, n. 95.

In spite of minor differences in nomenclature, the structural and functional similarity of the being-life-mind triad in the *Parmenides Commentary* and in the Platonizing Sethian treatises is clear. Both they and the *Commentary* understand the triad as the three phases by which a paradigmatic, indeterminate, prefiguration of determinate Being (τὸ εἶναι, ὕπαρξις) resident in the supreme One becomes determinate Being (τὸ ὄν, or the Barbelo Aeon). Like the *Commentary*, the *Three Steles of Seth* portrays the triad as a dynamic structure inherent in the second principle Barbelo, while *Zostrianos* tends to portray it as inherent in the supreme Invisible Spirit. *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* tend to confer a quasi-hypostatic status on the triad by identifying the Triple Powered One (or Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit) primarily with its median processional phase (e.g., Vitality, Life, Activity) interposed between the supreme Unknowable One and the Aeon of Barbelo, thereby insuring the transcendence of the former, while also preventing any discontinuity in the chain of being.

To complicate matters further, unlike the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Zostrianos* (and perhaps *Marsanes*), which only associate each single successive term of the Existence, Vitality, Mentality sequence (or its equivalent) with the three distinctive phases of emanation, *Allogenes* locates all three terms at each phase of the process, thus distinguishing three successive states or manifestations of the entire Existence, Vitality, Mentality triplet as it becomes successively active at the level of each of the three highest entities. In the *Unknowable One*, they are the purely infinitival acts of existing, living, and knowing (i.e., εἶναι, ζῆν, νοεῖν).

> **XI 61** [32] Now he (the Unknowable One) is [33] an entity insofar as he exists, in that he either [34] exists and will become, [35] or lives or knows, although he {lives}<acts> [36] without Mind [37] or Life or Existence [38] or Nonexistence, [39] incomprehensibly.

In the Triple Powered One, they are the abstract denominative qualities of Essentiality, Vitality, and Mentality (ὕπαρξις or ὀντότης, ζωότης, νοήτης).

> **XI 49** [26] He (the Triple Powered One) is Vitality and [27] Mentality and Essentiality. [28] So then, Essentiality [29] constantly includes its [30] Vitality and Mentality, [31] and [32] Vitality includes [33] Substantiality and [34] Mentality; Mentality includes [35] Life and Essentiality. [36] And the three are one, [37] although individually they are three.

In the resulting Aeon of Barbelo, they would be expressed as the fully determinate substantives Being, Life, and Intellect (τὸ ὄν, ζωή, νοῦς).

> **XI 48** [14] It is *Being* [15] with [the] latency of Existence that he (the Triple Powered One) provides, [16] [nourishing] [17] [it in] every way, since it is this (the Barbelo Aeon as Being) [18] that [shall] come into being when he [19] intelligizes himself.
>
> **XI 46** [32] And if one sees [33] one of the hidden ones, [he] [34] sees the Barbalo Aeon, [the] [35] unbegotten offspring of [that One]; [36] if one should [see] [37] how it [*lives*] ...
>
> **XI 51** [8] As for the invisible, spiritual Triple-[Powered] One, [9] outside of him [there is situated] [10] a non-discriminating, [11] incorporeal, [timeless] *knowledge*. [12] As with all [the] aeons, [13] the Barbelo-Aeon exists, [14] also endowed with the types [15] and *forms* of the things that truly [16] exist, the image of [17] Kalyptos. And endowed [18] with the reason cognizant of [19] these, it bears the male [20] Protophanes *Intellect* like [21] an image (i.e., of itself).

Moreover, one might combine the techniques of paronymy,[22] relative predominance and mutual implication by cyclic permutation (in each successively lower deployment of the triad, one term cyclically predominates and includes the other two as in *Allogenes* XI 49,26-37 and Proclus, *Elem. Theol.* prop. 103 cited above) to arrive at to arrive at an enneadic structure for the metaphysical ontology of *Allogenes*.

Thus at the level of the Invisible Spirit, the Being-Life-Mind triad is present as pure infinitival activity (Existing, Living, Thinking, though

22. Proclus (*In Parmenidem* 1106,1-1108,19 Cousin) mentions a technique of paronymy, in which infinitives, participles, and *nomina actionis* ontologically precede abstract denominatives in -της, which in turn ontologically precede their respective substantives, by which one may illustrate that acts precede their substantive results; an example would be this series of terms from most abstract to most substantial: νόημα, νοοῦν, νοότης, νοῦς (as though all derived from the causitive νοόω). Thus in *Allogenes*, the Unknowable One is pure active, infinitival being prior to substantial, determinate being.

dominantly existing); on the level of the Triple-Powered One, it is present as a triad of abstract qualities (Existence, Vitality, Mentality/Blessedness, though dominantly Vitality); and probably on the level of the Barbelo Aeon, as a triad of substantial realities, (Being, Life and Mind, though dominantly Mind). As the externalized First Thought of the supreme deity and the final phase of the Triple Powered One, the Barbelo Aeon is the universal Intellect, and is therefore also the realm of true Being (the authentic existents) and the source of Life.[23] Although it is not clear to what extent the Being, Mind, Life triad is to be related to the three principle aeonic levels in the Barbelo Aeon, on the basis of *Zostrianos* VIII 15,4-12 one might posit equivalencies between Kalyptos and Being, Protophanes and Mind, and Autogenes and Life; *Allogenes* does not make these equivalencies explicit, nor does it coordinate such equivalencies with the emanative dynamics of the Triple Powered One.[24]

Based on these factors, it appears that *Allogenes* conceives the Triple Powered One to be a dynamic three-in-one principle deploying itself in three phases in which each phase, while containing the other two, is characterized by the modality of the triad that predominates—and also contains the other two—within each phase of its unfolding. In the

23. All the Sethian treatises understand Barbelo as the Life-principle or the source of Life; see esp. *Steles Seth* VII 123,19-21, "Because of you is Life: from you comes Life. Because of you is Intellect: from you comes Intellect." Plotinus too characterizes Intellect as "boiling with Life" (*Ennead* VI, 5 [23] 12,9; VI, 7 [38] 12,23).

24. Although *Allogenes* does not explicitly identify the Life-component with Autogenes, this identification is clearly explicit in *Zostrianos* VIII 17,6-10: "Therefore the first perfect water of the Triple Powered One, <that of> Autogenes, [is] Life for the perfect souls, for it is a rational expression of the perfect god's creativity." Note that the order of the being-life-mind triad varies—as in Plotinus—in the Sethian treatises between being-life-mind (or existence, vitality, mentality/blessedness; cf. *Allogenes* XI 59,9-60,35; 61,32-39; *Zostrianos* VIII 19,16-21,1; 64,13-75,21 + 80,10-25 = Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-50,21) and being-mind-life (or existence, mentality/blessedness, vitality; cf. *Allogenes* XI 49,26-27; *Zostrianos* VIII 13,27-18,4). Because of the variations in the order of these terms both in ontological rank and in order of emanation, it is not at all clear that Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes are meant to correspond with these terms in any fixed way. Rather, one has to do with two separate traditions, the Platonic tradition of the being, life, and mind triad, and on the other hand the more specifically Sethian triad of Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes, which the authors of the Platonizing Sethian treatises may have tried to reconcile in various, often inconsistent, ways.

accompanying diagram, the italicized term indicates the relative predominance of one of the three modalities. The first—infinitival—phase coincides with the supreme One (or Invisible Spirit) and the third—substantival—phase with the Aeon of Barbelo, in effect giving rise to a median—qualitative—phase in which one might view the Triple-Powered One as distinct from—but simultaneously coordinate with—both the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo.

Unknowable One / Invisible Spirit	*Exists*	Lives	Knows
Triple-Powered One / Eternal Life	Existence	*Vitality*	Mentality
Barbelo / First Thought	Being	Life	*Mind*

This diagram should be compared to those given for the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the *Parmenides* commentary in Chapter 9. If this analysis is correct, it is interesting to find in *Allogenes* a supreme enneadic structure of the sort that, according to Lydus, Porphyry also placed at the head of his metaphysics on the basis of the *Chaldaean Oracles*.[25]

Nevertheless, there is a good deal of variation in the hypostatic status of the Triple Powered One and its components among the Sethian treatises. It appears that in the *Three Steles of Seth* (and in the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*), all three modalities of the emanative vehicle are only separate phases of the unfolding of intellect/Barbelo. In *Zostrianos*, the triple powered emanative vehicle seems to be identical with the supreme source, the Invisible Spirit. In *Allogenes*, the Triple Powered One seems to constitute a quasi-hypostasis—sometimes equated with the Invisible Spirit—mediating between the Unknowable One and the Aeon of Barbelo. In *Marsanes*, where the Existence-Life-Intellect terminology seems to be lacking, the emanative vehicle, the Triple Powered One, seems to be identical with the active silence of the supreme Unknown Silent One; its initial phase is the insubstantial (masculine) Invisible Spirit, its median phase is the Triple Powered One itself as a (feminine) indeterminate otherness or activity proceeding forth from the Invisible Spirit, and its final phase is the (masculine) Aeon of Barbelo. As previously suggested, some of this variation is perhaps to be explained by certain ambiguities in the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* or equivalent upon which these treatises probably depend.

25. On the basis of Lydus, *De mensibus* 4.122.1-4: Θεῖος ὁ τῆς ἐννάδος ἀριθμὸς ἐκ τριῶν τριάδων πληρούμενος καὶ τὰς ἀκρότητας τῆς θεολογίας κατὰ τὴν Χαλδαϊκὴν φιλοσοφίαν ὡς φησιν ὁ Πορφύριος ἀποσώζων.

What is interesting about *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* is that they imply a quasi-hypostatic status for the median and therefore *least* stable phase of the Triple Powered One, when it becomes distinct from either the absolute and self-sufficient stability of its source (the Invisible Spirit) or the derivative stability of its product (the intellectual Aeon of Barbelo). By contrast, the equivalent of the Triple Powered One in both the *Three Steles of Seth* and the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* is ultimately identified with its emanative product (Intellect) while in *Zostrianos*, it is identified with the supreme principle as its source.

II. The Realm of True Being

A. The Aeon of Barbelo

In addition to their distinctive doctrine of the Triple Powered One, the Platonizing Sethian treatises all share a peculiar triadic division of the Aeon of Barbelo, the self-knowledge of the Invisible Spirit. The oldest Sethian traditions all agree in conceiving Barbelo in dominantly triadic terms.[26] In the Sethian treatises that in all probability antedate the Platonizing treatises, Barbelo is conceived as fundamentally trimorphic: in the Pronoia monologue she makes three salvific descents that are later elaborated in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* as three successively articulate modes or forms (Voice, Speech, and Word), and in the theogony of the *Apocryphon of John* she is granted three successive attributes (Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility and Eternal Life). Yet already in the *Apocryphon of John*, one can see that numerological speculation has disturbed this original tripartite ontology when Barbelo is associated with a Pentad (or, in Irenaeus' version, with a tetrad).[27] In these early treatises, Barbelo's triplicity is several times signified by her epithet "Triple Male," referring to her character as a whole rather than to any specific

26. Cf. her traditional epithet "thrice-male, thrice-powerful, thrice-named," e.g., the *Apocryphon of John* II 5,8-9 and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 39,26-27; according to the former she possesses the three attributes of Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility, and Eternal Life, and according to the latter she appears in three successive manifestations, namely the Voice, the Speech, and the Word of the divine First Thought (= πρωτέννοια).

27. The Pentad (of the *Apocryphon of John*) consists of Barbelo herself, plus the tetrad (of Irenaeus) Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility, Eternal Life, and either Truth (the long version of Codices II and IV) or her own cognomen Ennoia (BG, Codex III, and Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.29.1).

beings or attributes resident "within" her; as explained in Chapter 7, it serves to designate her androgynous character as well as the potential existence of the Autogenes, the self-begotten Son, within her. Thus it would be natural to expect this epithet of triplicity to play some role in the Sethian Platonizing treatises as well. Indeed, what one sees there is an attempt to combine the traditional Sethian nomenclature for Barbelo with a Middle Platonic doctrine of a tripartite intellect as described in Chapter 9 in the cases of Numenius and Amelius and in Chapter 10 in the case of the early Plotinus.

According to the metaphysical scheme of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 4,19-32 cited above, p. 500), the unfolding of the primal unity into multiplicity occurs as a process of mental reflection by which the primal principle externalizes itself so as to avail itself both for itself and others in the form of his Pronoia or First Thought (πρόνοια, ἔννοια), named Barbelo. In turn, this feminine figure becomes the mother of a self-begotten (αὐτογενής) Son, thus giving rise to a supreme divine triad: the monadic Invisible Spirit, the mother Barbelo as his first thought, and her self-begotten Child (Autogenes). I have suggested that the nomenclature and metaphysics of this Father-Mother-Child triad was likely suggested by an interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* 48E-52D,[28] where Plato enumerates a triad of principles, leaving aside the demiurge, who would be a fourth:

> ...that which comes to be, that in which it comes to be, and that by imitation of which that which comes to be is born. We may fittingly compare the receptacle (τὸ δεχόμενον) to a mother, that from which to a father, and the natural being (φύσις) to a child (*Timaeus* 50C-D).

28. See Chapter 5, p. 210 and J. D. TURNER, "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 324-351; *IDEM*, "Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History," in *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, ed. C. W. Hedrick and R. Hodgson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 55-86; *IDEM*, "Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Sethian Texts from Nag Hammadi in their Relation to Later Platonic Literature," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. R. T. Wallis and J. Bregman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 424-459; *IDEM*, "Text, Translation and Notes" to *Allogenes* in *Nag Hammadi Codices XI, XII and XIII*, ed. C. W. Hedrick (Nag Hammadi Studies 28; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990); and *IDEM*, "Introduction" and "Commentaire," in C. Barry, W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, J. D. Turner, *Zostrien (NH VIII, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 24; Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000), 32-225; 483-662.

In the *Apocryphon of John*, Barbelo is conceived in terms that specify her threefold character and potential for triadic expansion:

> **BG 27** [18] She is the first thought, his [19] image. She became a first [20] Man who is the [21] virginal Spirit, the thrice-male, the thrice- **28** [1] powerful, the thrice-named, [2] the thrice-begotten, the androgynous [3] unaging aeon, who [4] came forth from his Providence.

The triadic expansion of Barbelo becomes explicit when she requests from the Invisible Spirit and is granted three principal attributes, Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility, and Eternal Life (πρόγνωσις, ἀφθαρσία, αἰώνια ζωή). As M. Waldstein points out:[29]

> Triads are a recurring pattern in the AJ. In his opening vision John sees a triple appearance (AJ 3,12); Jesus introduces himself to John as "the Father, the Mother and the Son" (AJ 4,2-4). Triads appear seven times in the unfolding of the heavenly world: first, the Monad unfolds into a Triad of Father, Mother and Son (AJ 5,3-17,6); second, Barbelo asks for and receives the Triad Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility and Eternal life (AJ 12,12-14,4); third, her son, the Self-Generated, asks for and receives the Mind (νοῦς), soon completed to a Triad by the Will (θέλημα) and the Word (λόγος) (AJ 16,18-17,2; 17,9; 17,13); fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh, each of the four great Luminaries has three aeons within it, the lowest of the twelve being Wisdom (AJ 19,14-20,18).

The dominantly threefold portrayal of Barbelo is also evident in the Pronoia monologue that occurs at the end of the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (II, 30,11-31,25), where she thrice descends to the earth for the salvation of her seed. The same pattern is continued in the expanded form of this monologue, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, where Barbelo, as the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit, reveals herself in successively articulate manifestations as Voice, Speech and Word.

In the Platonizing Sethian treatises *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*—and perhaps, but by no means clearly, in *Marsanes*—the Aeon of Barbelo contains three aeonic beings: Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes. These Hidden, First Appearing, and Self-generated

29. "The Primal Triad in the Apocryphon of John," in *The Nag Hammadi Library After Fifty Years: Proceedings of the 1995 Society of Biblical Literature* Commemoration, ed. J. D. Turner and A. McGuire (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 44; Leiden, New York, & Köln: E. J. Brill, 1997), 154-187; the *Apocryphon of John* references therein are to M. WALDSTEIN and F. WISSE, *The Apocryphon of John: Synopsis of Nag Hammadi Codices II,1; III,1; and IV,1 with BG 8502,2* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 33; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995).

aeonic levels of the Barbelo Aeon not only represent the progressive unfolding of the divine Thought or Mind, but are also described as presiding over certain classes of incorporeal beings as well as groups of other distinct aeonic beings. *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* define the three subdivisions of the Barbelo Aeon according to the ontology of their content, roughly corresponding to the ontology of the Plotinian hypostases of Intellect and Soul:

1. the domain of "the authentic existents" (τὰ ὄντως ὄντα, the νοητά) presided over by Kalyptos, the Hidden One, a sort of contemplated intellect (νοῦς νοητός) rather like the contemplated aspect of the Plotinian Intellect;
2. the domain of "those who are unified" (i.e. forms and souls that "exist together" prior to differentiation or perhaps minds and ideas which are unified through intellection)[30] presided over by Protophanes, the First Appearing One, a sort of contemplating intellect (νοῦς νόερος) rather like the contemplating aspect of the Plotinian Intellect; and
3. the domain of the "individuals" (differentiated souls and forms) presided over by Autogenes (the Self-begotten One, a sort of νοῦς διανοούμενος) who operates to rectify the realm of Nature, rather like the Plotinian Soul in its lower manifestation as Logos or individuated souls.[31]

30. Cf. *Ennead* IV, 1 [42], 1,5-7: ἐκεῖ ἐν τῷ νῷ ὁμοῦ μὲν πᾶς νοῦς ... ὁμοῦ δὲ πάσαι ψυχαί.

31. According to *Allogenes* (XI 51,12-37), as cosmic Mind, Barbelo contains both those things that truly exist (the Ideas) as well as their types and images, which constitute the image of the Hidden One, Kalyptos. Unlike Plotinus' Nous, Barbelo is not only the aeonic place of the Ideas, but also that of their images. Three such images are named: Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes. Barbelo thus contains 1) the truly existing objects (ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧⲙⲙⲟⲟⲡ ⲟⲛⲧⲱⲥ) of intellection, the Ideas, as the image of Kalyptos, 2) "the intellectual principle (Porphyry defines Nous as an incorporeal νοερὸς λόγος, *Sententiae* 42.12) of these things (Ideas)," as the image of Protophanes (the domain of those who are "unified," ⲛⲏ ⲉⲧϩⲓⲟⲩⲙⲁ), who apparently intelligizes the Ideas in Kalyptos and operates (ἐνεργεῖν) with them on the individuals (ⲛⲓⲕⲁⲧⲁⲟⲩⲁ), which in turn are 3) the image of Autogenes, who acts successively and step-by-step to master (ⲧⲁϩⲟ, "to set straight") the defects of the realm of φύσις, tantamount to taking on the demiurgic role of the cosmic soul. Cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* V, 1 [10] 3,7-10: [The soul] is a certain image of Intellect; just as a thought in its utterance (cf. λόγος προφορικός) is an image of the thought in the soul (cf. λόγος ἐνδιάθετος), so soul is itself the expressed thought of Intellect, and its whole activity, and the life which it sends forth for the establishment of another reality. ('Η ψυχὴ εἰκών τίς ἐστι νοῦ· οἷον λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ λόγου τοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ, οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτὴ λόγος νοῦ καὶ ἡ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια καὶ ἣν προΐεται ζωὴν εἰς ἄλλου ὑπόστασιν).

The Aeon of Barbelo seems to be an Intellect consisting of the contemplated Ideas (νοῦς νοητός), the contemplating Mind (νοῦς νόερος or θεωρητικός or κινούμενος ἀκίνητος ὤν), and the demiurgic Mind (νοῦς διανοούμενος) similar to that considered by Plotinus in *Ennead* III, 9 [13], 1 and rejected in *Ennead* II, 9 [33], 1. As pointed out in Chapter 9, Numenius probably derived these three ontological levels from a Middle Platonic elaboration of the three "Kings" of the Second Platonic Letter (312E) and of the One-Being of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* 142B-144E, understood as signifying the many-in-one character of determinate being, looked at from the point of view of a unitary intelligence (cf. Barbelo) who intelligizes all the divine forms simultaneously.

Associated with these three levels are the figures Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes (who is normally the third member of the supreme Father-Mother-Child triad in the older Sethian treatises). Originally, these names seem to have referred, not so much to the ontological levels of the Barbelo Aeon, but rather to the process by which the Barbelo Aeon gradually unfolds from its source in the Invisible Spirit: it is at first "hidden" (καλυπτός) or latent as potential intellect in the Spirit, then "first appearing" (πρωτοφανής) as the Father's separately existing (male) intelligence, finally, taking on the character of a "self-generated" (αὐτογενής) demiurgical mind, perhaps understood as the rational or intellectual part of the cosmic soul that operates on the physical world below in accordance with its vision of the realm of the archetypal ideas contained in the divine intellect. Once the Barbelo Aeon is instantiated, these three phases then become conceived as beings—"subaeons"—who preside over and thus define three ontological levels or sub-aeons within the Barbelo Aeon that have certain functions relating to the upward and downward transfer of their members from one to another of these three ontological levels. It is noteworthy that *Marsanes* merely lists these three beings and the Barbelo Aeon in serial fashion as "Seals" 7, 8, and 9 with no suggestion that they are subaeons subordinate to and included within the Barbelo Aeon (Seal 10). While *Zostrianos* goes into great

detail concerning the structure of the Barbelo Aeon, and *Allogenes* goes into great detail concerning the Triple Powered One, *Marsanes* concentrates only on the process by which the Barbelo Aeon emanates from the Invisible Spirit and—unlike any of the other Platonizing Sethian treatises—deals extensively with the nature of the soul and its "configurations."

As we have seen in past chapters, the tripartition of the Barbelo Aeon has traditional warrant in Sethian theology. In the *Apocryphon of John*, Barbelo, the First Thought (ἔννοια) of the Invisible Spirit, requests the Invisible Spirit to grant her three principal attributes, Foreknowledge, Incorruptibility and Eternal Life.[32] In the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, Barbelo reveals herself to the perceptible world in three successively articulate manifestations of the First Thought: Voice, Speech and Word. Once the dominantly triadic Barbelo becomes conceived as the divine Intellect (rather than "thought"), it is only a short step to interpret such attributes or modes of appearance as defining various grades of ideal entities—forms, ideas, minds, or even souls—contained within that Intellect, entities that can be distinguished by their ontological status.

Thus Kalyptos would be the contemplated Mind, containing the paradigmatic ideas or authentic existents, each of which is a unique, uncombinable paradigmatic form.[33] Protophanes would be the contemplating Mind, containing a subdivision of the ideas, "those who are unified," i.e., "all together"[34] with the minds that contemplate them, distinguished both from ideas of particular things and from the distinctly unique authentic existents as congeries of similar units capable of combination with one other (cf. Plato's "mathematicals" *apud* Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 987b14-18 and XIII 1080a11-b14). At the lowest level, Autogenes would be a demiurgic mind who shapes the realm of Nature below according to the forms contemplated and analyzed by Protophanes, and

32. πρόγνωσις, ἀφθαρσία, αἰώνια ζωή in BG 28,4-29,8; II 5,11-6,2 adds Truth as a fourth attribute. These attributes and others also occur in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, III 42,5-11.

33. See *Allogenes* XI 46,6-35. *Zostrianos* (VIII 82,8-13) says that Kalyptos emerges as the second knowledge of the Invisible Spirit (the first being Barbelo), "the knowledge of his knowledge;" in 119,12-13 Kalyptos is associated with "his ἰδέα." *Marsanes* apparently contains no description of Kalyptos' origin, function or attributes.

34. Cf. *Ennead* IV, 1 [42] 1,5-6: ἐκει δὲ (i.e., ἐν τῷ νῷ) ὁμοῦ μὲν νοῦς πᾶς καὶ οὐ διακεκριμένον οὐδὲ μεμερισμένον, ὁμοῦ δὲ πάσαι ψυχαί.

would thus contain the "perfect individuals," the ideas of particular, individual things, as well as individual souls.

Within the Aeon of Barbelo, Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes sustain certain relationships to one another as well as to powers that transcend the Barbelo Aeon altogether. These relationships are perhaps most strikingly articulated by means of *Zostrianos*' doctrine of celestial baptism, which equates each baptismal water with a separate power of the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit, and with each subaeon of the Barbelo Aeon:[35]

> **VIII 15** [4] It is the water of Life that [5] belongs to Vitality in which you now [6] have been baptized in the Autogenes. [7] It is the [water] of Blessedness [8] that [belongs] to Knowledge in which you [9] will be [baptized] in the Protophanes. [10] It is the water of Existence [11] [which] belongs to Divinity, that is, [12] to Kalyptos. [13] And the water of Life [14] [exists with respect to] Power, that of [15] [Blessedness] with respect to Essence, [16] and that of [Divinity] with respect to [17] [Existence].

In VIII 17,15-22, it becomes clear that, just as the Aeon of Barbelo came into existence as an indeterminate vital energy of the Invisible Spirit that converts itself into determinate being by an act of contemplation, so also those who undergo baptism in these waters will take on form and definition in the same way:

> **VIII 17** [15] [But] he who simultaneously knows [16] [how he exists] and what [17] [the] living [water is], [18] [such a one] lives within [19] [knowledge. That which belongs to knowledge] is the [20] [water of] Vital[ity]. And in [21] [becoming, Life] becomes [limitless] [22] [that it may receive] its [own Being].

Baptism in the water of Autogenes opens the way for participation in the universal intelligence, knowledge of which is signified by the water of

35. The passage may be corrupt: under the influence of the Sethian baptismal rite the term "water of Life" has been substituted for a probable "water of goodness" (quite in line with the intention of the author of *Zostrianos*), and the terms "Existence" and "Divinity" have been reversed (*lege* "the water of Divinity, which is that of Existence, into which you shall be baptized in Kalyptos"). But the association of Blessedness with Mentality is clear. In *Allogenes* 58,7-26, it seems that *Zostrianos*' more original equation of the triad Existence or Divinity, Blessedness and Perfection or Goodness with the triad Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes has been disturbed by the addition of another figure, the Triple Male, to yield the equation of the Divinity, Blessedness and Goodness triad with that of Barbelo, Kalyptos and Autogenes, omitting Protophanes, who is also identified with the goodness of the Triple Male; both these latter are also identified as "perfect."

Protophanes, and final union with it is signified by the water of Kalyptos (VIII 22,4-12).

Among the Platonizing Sethian treatises, there are variations in the structuring and content of the Aeon of Barbelo. *Marsanes* declines to give any explicit description of its content. *Allogenes* (XI 45,31-46,35) says that Autogenes, and by implication Protophanes and Kalyptos, is "contained" in the Barbelo Aeon. *Zostrianos* makes it clear only that these beings are subjacent to the Barbelo Aeon. The *Three Steles of Seth* merely identifies Barbelo (VII 122,8-123,5) as a "Kalyptos ... a universe of understanding" and as having become "a great male Mind, Protophanes," and the first stele tends to collapse together the figures of Pigeradamas and Autogenes as if the latter were an attribute of the former. In *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, besides the canonical triad of Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes, there is the additional figure of the Triple Male, to be discussed below.

Marsanes' presentation of the Barbelo Aeon as the tenth seal (X 4,7-10) is nearly obliterated and seems to lack the clear structure, sequencing, and terminological precision of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. *Marsanes* appears to treat the figures of Autogenes, Protophanes, and Kalyptos by allusion to the circumstances of their origin rather than by function, proper name, or ontological level: thus Autogenes is the "self-generated power" and "Third [perfect Mind]," the name "Protophanes" is translated as the "male mind that appeared in the beginning" and called the "intelligible world," and Kalyptos, though counted as an independent being with its own distinct seal (9), is apparently not even assigned a proper name, but is merely called the "[head]" of the first-appearing power. *Marsanes* has also apparently jettisoned the tripartite ontology of determinate being applied by the other Sethian Platonizing treatises to the Barbelo Aeon. The partitioning of the Aeon of Barbelo is no longer articulated either aeonically or ontologically in terms of the kinds of being and objects of intellection contained therein. *Marsanes* merely lists Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes (in the "standard" order) as beings that are subordinate to, but not necessarily included within the Barbelo Aeon, and the ontological triad of the authentic existents (in Kalyptos), the unified ones (in Protophanes), and the perfect individuals (in Autogenes) seems to be entirely lacking.

In the Sethian descent pattern treatises, "Kalyptos" occurs in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (IV 57,16) and as a cognomen for Barbelo in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 38,10). "Protophanes" occurs in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (IV 55,25) as a cognomen for the Thrice-male Child, and in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 8,32) as a cognomen for the "true human" Pigeradamas (and perhaps also as a cognomen for the "triple male" and "first human" Barbelo in II 5,11). In the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (and *Zostrianos*) Prophania functions as Adamas' consort in the production of Seth and the Four Luminaries. It appears that at an early point, certain Sethians regarded either Barbelo or Pigeradamas as the archetypal Human who "first appeared" as bisexual, both female (as the Ennoia of the god "Man") and male (as Triple Male Child, the Son of the god "Man"). When the Father-Mother-Child triad was adopted as the supreme Sethian triad, these two figures became distinct Mother (Barbelo) and Son/Child (Autogenes) figures, continuing to bear their older epithets. When the Platonizing Sethian treatises reconceived Barbelo as a divine Intellect or Aeon, these epithets or cognomens were parceled out as its three subaeons, according to which the Barbelo Aeon was initially hidden (Kalyptos), then first appeared (Protophanes), and then instantiated (Autogenes), while the Triple Male Child continued Barbelo's soteriological role as a being at large in the Barbelo Aeon, generally associated with Protophanes and Autogenes.

B. Kalyptos-the "Hidden One"

Kalyptos, "Hidden One" (sometimes abbreviated $\overline{\text{KAC}}$) appears frequently in *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and Codex Bruce *Untitled*, and once in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (IV 57,16).[36] As the highest ontological level in the Barbelo Aeon, Kalyptos is generally conceived as a static intellect that contains the ultimate paradigms of all things (τὰ ὄντως ὄντα) and serves as an object of contemplation by the inhabitants of lower orders of reality. In the *Three Steles of Seth*

36. The name may have something to do with a covering or veil (κάλυμμα) separating the higher from the lower realm (like the καταπέτασμα of *Hyp. Arch.* II 97,9-11 which makes a shadow; cf. *Gos. Philip* II 69,6; 84,23). Similarly, Valentinus or followers of his (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* I.11,1; *Val. Exp.* XI 37-38) postulated an upper limit (*Horos*) separating the supreme deity Bythos from his subordinate Aeons including his Son the Nous (which in *Allogenes et al.* is called Protophanes). In mythology, one might think of Kalypso, a daughter of Okeanos and Tethys (Homer, *Odyssey, passim*; Hesiod, *Theogony* 359; *Orph. Frg.* 49 Kern; cf. also the morning, mid-day and nocturnal suns called φανερῶν καλυπταί in *Pap. Mag.* V.7.9 = II,73.221 Preisendanz).

(VII 122,14b-123,5), the Barbelo Aeon is praised as a "Kalyptos" who derives from the "shadow," i.e., the projected image of the One, and thus in turn confers generation, being, and intelligible forms upon subsequent levels of reality.

In *Zostrianos* (VIII 113,14b-123,25), the Aeon of Kalyptos receives an extensive treatment of nearly ten pages that detail its origin and content. In general, Kalyptos is almost always called "ingenerate" (ἀγέννητος) in the sense that he is emanated rather than procreated; thus in VIII 20,4-15 he is called "self-generated" (αὐτογέν[ν]ητος or αὐτογενής), without a parent. He is the Good, the source of all that is good and divine (VIII 117,15-20). In fact, Kalyptos is a duplication of the Aeon of Barbelo itself, a secondary form of Barbelo's knowledge, providing an "eternal space" for the "truly existent ones" that will reside in her aeon (VIII 81,21-82,23). Kalyptos is also a "pre-existent principle" of Autogenes and a "cause" of all the aeons, but especially of the male Mind Protophanes, who is his "knowledge" (VIII 40,6; 41,21-25). To undergo baptism in Kalyptos is to understand the emanation of multiplicity from original unity and the return of multiplicity to its unitary principle (VIII 23,6-17).

In *Allogenes*, Kalyptos originates from the Barbelo Aeon's act of knowledge (XI 45,31-33) and becomes the domain of the "types and forms" of the authentic existents (τὰ ὄντως ὄντα) hidden in the Barbelo Aeon, and the plurality of determinate beings "that are unified" in Protophanes will eventually be promoted to the level of Kalyptos (XI 46,25b-31; cf. VII 119,15-120,17). In *Marsanes* (X 4,7b-10a), Kalyptos is merely mentioned in passing, apparently as "the [head (ⲁⲡⲉ, perhaps translating κεφαλή or ἀρχή)] of the power (δύναμις) [that] appeared [in the beginning]," i.e., as the immediate source of Protophanes.

C. Protophanes

The median level of Barbelo is the male Mind Protophanes, "the First-appearing One," named quite often in *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, three times in Codex Bruce *Untitled*, and once each in the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes*.[37] While Kalyptos represents the divine Intellect in its

37. In the *Apocryphon of John*, (II 8,33) Pigeradamas is called "the first appearance" and in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (IV 55,25) the Triple Male Child is called "the first one who appeared," both apparently translations of Protophanes. His name seems to be inspired by the Orphic doctrine of Phanes (also called Eros, Metis and Erekepaios) who was "first to appear" from the cosmic egg (Apoll. Rh., *Orph. Arg.* 14-16). Bisexual, he was regarded as "always two-formed," "looking this way and that," "the key of Mind" (*Orph. Frg.* 72-89; 167 Kern; Synesius, *Hymn* 2.87-89 Terzaghi calls the "Son" member of the Trinity "firstborn and first-appearing child" [γόνον τὸν πρωτόγονον καὶ πρωτοφαῆ]). Both the Orphic etymology "first appearing" and his characterization as mind and his double inclination above and below are clearly reflected in his position in *Allogenes* (X 45,34-36; 46,24-25), where he represents the progression from the psychic "individuals" (in Autogenes) to the intelligible (authentic existents in Kalyptos) levels of the Aeon of Barbelo.

undifferentiated unity, Protophanes is that faculty of the divine Intellect that unifies multiplicity, a "many-in-one," rather as Plotinus conceived Intellect as the unified duality of thinking and all the objects that it thinks, not separately and sequentially, but always simultaneously. In the *Three Steles of Seth* VII 123,4b-5, he is merely mentioned as Barbelo's manifestation in the form of "a great male Mind (νοῦς)." In *Marsanes* X 4,2b-7a, Protophanes is "the [male] mind (νοῦς) [that] appeared [in the beginning] as well as the [incorporeal] substance (οὐσία) and the [intelligible] world (νοητὸς κόσμος)." For *Zostrianos*, he is the "actuality" (VIII 127,9-10) and the dwelling place for "all those who are unified in the aeons" (VIII 19,21-24), containing "those who] dwell together [in order that they become] all-perfect [and blessed]" (VIII 40,14-16). In relation to the three powers of the Invisible Spirit, Protophanes possesses Mentality, but has his Existence in Kalyptos (VIII 40,8-10). He is the image of Kalyptos, "equal to him in glory and power, superior to him in rank, though not in aeonic level," and "possesses them all, alive, dwelling together in unity with the aeon within the aeons" (VIII 125,1-8). Therefore, to undergo baptism in Protophanes is to know the universal intelligence and one's commonality with its contents (VIII 22,4-23,5).

D. Autogenes—and Sophia?

The lowest level of Barbelo's Aeon is Autogenes, whose name is derived from the Sethian tradition of the third member of the Father-Mother-Child triad. Autogenes contains the "(perfect) individuals" as his members. He occupies the lowest of the three levels of the Barbelo Aeon, and most Sethian treatises have him presiding over the most elaborated and traditional set of four aeons in Sethian theology, the Self-generated Aeons, which he structures by establishing over them "the

Four Luminaries"—Armozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, and Eleleth from highest to lowest—as places of salvation and rest for the archetypal Adam, Seth, and seed of Seth, as well as all repentant souls (cf. *Apocryphon of John* II 7,30-9,24; *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 38,17-39,13; *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 51,14-53,12).

By virtue of his position at the periphery of the Barbelo Aeon, Autogenes functions as a demiurgical mind or discursive (διανοούμενος rather than contemplative, θεωρητικός) intellect who operates on the lower realms by imposing shape and form upon matter and bodies. In the *Three Steles of Seth* VII 119,15-120,17, Autogenes is virtually indistinguishable from the archetypal Adam Pigeradamas, the initial object of Seth's praises in the first stele; Autogenes is the unengendered source of goodness that manifests the eternal authentic existents (τὰ ὄντως ὄντα) to the perceptible world (αἰσθητὸς κόσμος). In *Allogenes*, Autogenes is the Barbelo Aeon's means of interacting with the "perfect individuals," presumably the entire class of particulars, including individuated souls and divine beings resident in his own aeon prior to their unification in the Protophanes Aeon, as well as souls and other entities below his own aeon who inhabit the realm of corporeal nature. He is thus oriented both above and below. On the one hand, by "seeing" the ὄντως ὄντα or universal Forms in the Barbelo Aeon "[all] existing individually just as [they] are," his vision of the universals results in their individuation; thereupon, these individuals become "as he is," and are able to "see" the next higher being, the Triple Male, to whose unified thought they are effectively promoted (XI 46,9-20). On the other hand, Autogenes is also oriented below:

> **XI 51** [25] It (the Barbelo Aeon) is endowed with the [26] divine Autogenes like [27] an image, and he knows [28] each one of these, [29] acting separately and [30] individually, continually rectifying [31] the defects from [32] Nature.

Here, much like the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*, Autogenes is constantly occupied with the shaping of the natural realm, literally "setting right," "stabilizing," or "rectifying (ⲧⲁϩⲟ ⲉⲣⲁⲧϥ) the defects (literally "sins," ⲛⲟⲃⲉ) from nature" (φύσις). In this "demiurgical" activity, the position of Autogenes is very much like that of Numenius' "second" God described in Chapter 9, a divine intellect that first generates itself and the sensible cosmos by a contemplative "seeing" of the first God (who "thinks" only insofar as he "makes use" of this second God, frgs. 20-22 des Places), but then in his preoccupation with the realm of

matter below him, this second God is "split" in two, in effect becoming two lower intellects, a "second God" or contemplative intellect who contemplates the first (just as Autogenes contemplates Protophanes, who contemplates Kalyptos), and a "third God" or demiurgical intellect who discursively attends to the shaping of the physical realm below. Thus, like the "double" (διττός) second Intellect of the *Chaldaean Oracles* and Numenius, so too Autogenes is a lower intellect that is both contemplative and demiurgic, as it were, "facing both ways."[38] In this regard, *Marsanes* is even more explicit:

> **X 3** [25] And the [seventh (seal),] [26] concerning the Self-generated (αὐτογενής) Power [27] which [is the] [28] third [perfect Mind], [29] [the second who extended to] **4** [1] [the] Fourth for salvation [2] [through] wisdom (σοφία).
>
> **X 5** [21] And [22] the intelligible world knew [23] by discrimination [24] that in every respect the sense-perceptible [25] world is [worthy] [26] of being preserved entire, [for] [27] I have not ceased speaking [of the] [28] Autogenes, [lest] [29] [anyone] be [ignorant] **6** [1] in turn of the entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm). [2] He (Autogenes) descended, again he descended [3] <from> the Unbegotten One [4] who is insubstantial, who [5] is the Spirit. The one (Autogenes) who exists [6] before all of them (the realms below the Barbelo Aeon) extends [7] [to the divine] self-generated ones. [8] The one who is [9] [substantial (Autogenes)] examines [10] [the all (the Barbelo Aeon)] and is [11] [the all and] resembles [12] [the all]. And from [13] [the single one] they [are] divided, [14] [so that] I experienced [15] many things, it being manifest [16] that he saved a multitude. [17]

The divine Autogenes (the "self-generated Power") is here called the "third [perfect Mind]"—the first and second are probably the Barbelo Aeon (or Kalyptos) and Protophanes. In *Marsanes*, Autogenes is the principal savior figure; as the one whose task is the salvation or preservation of the realms below the Barbelo Aeon, indeed of the entire sensible world, Autogenes and his descent becomes a principal topic of Marsanes' preaching. Just as the second power of the Invisible Spirit's Triple Power is the "first" to proceed forth to become its third power in the form of the Aeon of Barbelo itself, so also Autogenes becomes the

38. In a slightly different context, cf. Plotinus, *Ennead* III, 8 [30] 9,30-31: "Rather, Intellect must return, so to speak, backwards, and give itself up, so to speak, to what lies behind it, since it faces both ways (ἀμφίστομον ὄντα); and there, if it wishes to see that First Principle, it must not be altogether intellect."

"[second who extended]" to the "Fourth" for salvation "[through] Sophia" (X 3,29-4,2).[39]

Extant Sethian literature does not describe Autogenes himself as ever actually leaving the Barbelo Aeon, although it is clear that he somehow operates on the sensible cosmos below for its "correction." *Marsanes* agrees with this principle when it says in X 6,5-7 that Autogenes descends from the Invisible Spirit to the Self-generated Aeon, where his own vision of the Barbelo Aeon results in the plurality of its contents (i.e., the perfect individuals). But then it also says that Autogenes is able to "extend" his salvific activity to the incorporeal but sensible realm of the "Fourth"—i.e., the next two lower levels below the Self-generated Aeons, the Repentance and Sojourn—not directly, but instead by the instrumentality of Sophia. Certainly such a notion accords well with Marsanes' declaration that "in every respect the sense-perceptible world is [worthy] of being preserved entire" (X 5,24-26), a declaration that immediately causes him to announce that he has "not ceased speaking [of the] Autogenes," who is presumably the guarantor of its preservation. What is interesting is that he does so by means of Sophia.

It appears that *Marsanes* offers yet another instance of the doctrine of Sophia as a "saved savior" (*salvator salvandus*). Although *Marsanes* apparently knows nothing of the "fall" of Sophia or of any causative association between her and the physical realm, in other Sethian treatises her declination is directly responsible for the formation either of the material realm (e.g., *Zostrianos* VIII 9,16-10,20a and perhaps the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 56,26-57,5) or of its creator the Archon (e.g., the *Apocryphon of John* II 9,25-10,19), or both (e.g., the *Hypostasis of the Archons* II 94,4-33). Whether it is Sophia or Eleleth (e.g., the *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 39,13-32 or the *Gospel of the Egyptians*

39. Restoring X 4,1-2 as "salvation [through] wisdom" (ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲭⲉ[ⲉⲓ ϩⲓⲧ]ⲛ̄ ⲧⲥⲟⲫ[ⲓ]ⲁ·) rather than "the salvation of Sophia" (ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲡⲟⲩⲭⲉ[ⲉⲓ] ⲛ̄ⲧⲥⲟⲫ[ⲓ]ⲁ·) in the edition of PEARSON. As instrument of salvation, this "wisdom" may be either revealed wisdom or may be the personified figure of Sophia, the story of whose decline and restoration is recounted in many Sethian treatises. In Sethian mythology, the salvation or restoration to the Self-generated Aeons undergone by Sophia is in fact the result of her repentance; cf. the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 59,9-60,2 where Sophia's repentance is itself hypostatized as a figure "Metanoia" sent below by the father to pray for the repentance of all humans, both the seed of Seth *and* of the Archon Saklas! Codex Bruce, *Untitled* 264.1 [Schmidt-MacDermot] likewise locates Sophia in the Repentance.

III 56,22-59,1) who was ultimately to blame for the origin of the physical and material realm with all of its deficiencies, it is Sophia who enters into "deficiency" and must be "restored." In both the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 40,2-4) and the *Apocryphon of John* (II 13,13-14,13), after the Archon's theft of Sophia's power and his vain boast of sole divinity, Sophia becomes the first object of the divine world's salvific initiatives: she recognizes her deficiency, then either repents or requests restoration, and is then restored by elevation to the periphery of the divine world above her defective product. So also in *Zostrianos* (VIII 9,2-11,1), when Sophia gives rise—not to the Archon—but to the lower Matter upon which he works, she cancels her deficiency through repentance, and is (conjecturally) restored:

> **VIII 10** [28] And [again he (Authrounios) said, "Sophia became] [29] perfect through [the will of] [30] [the commander] through whom [the atmospheric] [31] [realm perseveres], having **11** [1] [immutably averted] the destruction of the world."

In general, the agent of Sophia's restoration remains anonymous: the divine world, the Pleroma, the "entire house of glory." But here *Zostrianos* designates this agent as a specific—though anonymous—"commander"[40] who wills the final perfection of Sophia, thus ensuring the eternal duration of the cosmos. Given the fact that *Marsanes* identifies the guarantor of the preservation of the cosmos as Autogenes, it may be that *Zostrianos*' otherwise anonymous savior is none other than Autogenes.

While such passages portray Sophia as the one "saved" (*salvandus*), *Marsanes* (X 3,25-4,2, cited previously), the *Apocryphon of John*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* portray her as "savior" (*salvator*). In the *Apocryphon of John*, Sophia takes on a salvific role: appearing in the world as Zôê, mother of the living, she makes up for her "deficiency" by enlightening the earthly couple fashioned by the Archon; appearing later as Epinoia, she apparently assists Barbelo's retrieval of the divine power stolen from her by the Archon:

40. *Zostrianos* identifies both Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus (VIII 47,5-7) and the Triple Powered One (VII 124,3-5) as commanders, while *Melchizedek* identifies the Four Luminaries (IX 6,3-7; 17,6-18,6) as commanders and Jesus Christ as commander-in-chief.

II 23 [14] For [15] his (Adam's) consort will be sent to him, [16] and "he will leave his father and his mother [17] and cleave to his wife, and the two will become [18] one flesh". {For his consort will be sent [19] to him and he will leave [20] his father and mother.} Our sister Wisdom, [21] who came down in innocence [22] so that she might set right her deficiency, [23] was therefore named 'Life,' i.e., [24] the Mother of the living, by the Providence [25] of heavenly authority. And through her [26] they (Adam and Eve) tasted of the perfect knowledge.

II 25 [3] the Mother (Barbelo) also sent down her Spirit (the Epinoia) [4] to the likeness of her (Sophia) who resembles her, and as [5] a copy of her (Barbelo) who is in the Pleroma, so that she might [6] prepare a dwelling-place for the aeons who descend. ... [9] It was in this way that [10] the seed existed for [11] a season, rendering service, so that when [12] the Spirit (Epinoia) comes forth from [13] the holy aeons, it might set it right and [14] heal it of the deficiency, so that the [15] whole Pleroma might become holy and [16] without deficiency.

In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the repentant and restored Sophia appears as a new figure named "Repentance" (μετάνοια), distinct from—but clearly related to—the "hylic Sophia" who looked down; however, the "Father" responsible for her "completion" does not seem to be Autogenes:

III 59 [1] Then a Voice [2] came from on high, saying, [3] "The Man exists, and the Son of the Man." [4] Because of the descent of the image [5] above, which is like its voice in the height [6] of the image which has looked out, [7] through the looking out of the image [8] above, the first creature was [9] formed. Because of this [10] Metanoia came to be. She received her [11] completion and her power by the will [12] of the Father and his approval with which he [13] approved of the great, incorruptible, [14] immovable race of the great, [15] mighty men of the great Seth, [16] in order that he may sow it in the aeons which [17] had been brought forth, so that, through her (Metanoia), [18] the deficiency may be filled up. [19] For she had come forth from above down [20] to the world which is the image of the night. [21] When she had come, she prayed for (the repentance of) both the seed [22] of the archon of this aeon and (the) authorities [23] who had come forth from him—that [24] defiled (seed) of the demon-begetting god [25] which will be destroyed—and the seed **60** [1] of Adam and the great Seth, [2] which is like the sun.

It may be that this distinct figure of Metanoia is the inspiration behind *Marsanes*' and *Zostrianos*' doctrine of the two realms immediately subjacent to the Self-generated Aeons called the Repentance (the Fourth) and the Sojourn (the Fifth), to be discussed in Chapter 13. Be that as it may, it is nonetheless clear that this alter ego of Sophia has a role in the

salvational process. In several Sethian texts, Sophia is thus a "saved savior." What is interesting is that *Marsanes* seems to present her as the salvific instrument of Autogenes, who is thereby enabled to remain within the Barbelo Aeon, yet still work for the perfection of the lower world without being "split" by preoccupation with it.

E. The Triple Male Child

In addition to Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes, according to *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and the *Three Steles of Seth*—but not *Marsanes*—the Barbelo aeon frequently includes another being, the Triple Male Child. He figures in salvific importance alongside the former three (e.g., in doxologies), but does not seem to define a separate aeonic level in the Barbelo Aeon, since no special class of beings is assigned to him as in the case of the previous three. In *Allogenes*, the Triple Male is clearly a principal savior figure:

XI 45 [31] [And] she (Barbelo) became Kalyptos, [32] [because] she acted in those whom she [33] knows. [34] She is a perfect, [35] invisible, noetic [36] Protophanes-Harmedon. Empowering [37] the individuals, she is Triple Male, [38] since she is individually .... **46** [6] [Individual on the one hand, they are] [7] [unified] on the other, [since she] is [their] [8] [Existence], and she [sees] [9] all those who truly <exist>. [Truly] [10] [she] contains the [11] divine Autogenes. When she [knew] [12] her Existence [13] and when she stood at rest [upon] [14] this one (Autogenes), he saw them [all] [15] existing individually just as [they] [16] are. And when [they] [17] become as he is, [they shall] [18] see the divine Triple Male, [19] the power that is [higher than] [20] God. [He is the thought] [21] of all those who [are] [22] unified. If he (the Triple Male) [contemplates them], [23] he contemplates the [24] great male, [25] [perfect?], noetic [Protophanes]. As for their [26] [procession], if [he] [27] sees it, [he sees] [28] [also the truly existing ones], [29] [since it is the] procession [for those who] [30] are unified. And when [he has seen] [31] these (truly existing), he has seen Kalyptos. [32] And if he sees [33] one of the hidden ones, [he] [34] sees the Barbalo-Aeon, [the] [35] unbegotten offspring of [that One].

XI 58 [12] I saw: the good divine Autogenes; [13] and the Savior [14] who is the [15] youthful, perfect Triple Male; and his [16] goodness, the [17] noetic, perfect Protophanes-Harmedon; [18] and the Blessedness [19] of the Kalyptos; and the [20] primary origin of the Blessedness, [21] the Barbelo-Aeon [22] full of Divinity; [23] and the primary origin of [24] the one without origin, the [25] Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit, the Universal One [26] that is higher than perfect.

In the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 120,17-121,16; 123,6-7) as in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the terms "Triple Male"

and "Child" are cognomens of Barbelo herself, who becomes the object of praise at the end of the first stele, there addressed as "Triple Male" by Emacha Seth and his Meirotheid father, Pigeradamas.[41]

The origin and identity of the figure of the Triple Male Child is particularly puzzling. It will be recalled from the discussion of the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 27,18-28,4) and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 37,20-30) in Chapter 7, that the term "Triple Male" was originally a characterization of the entire Aeon of Barbelo. *Zostrianos* (always the "Triple Male Child") and *Allogenes* (always the "Triple Male") in effect convert this attribute of the entire Aeon into a separate being inhabiting that Aeon. Although its state of textual deterioration prevents any certainty, *Marsanes* may have omitted this figure, perhaps because it reserves the attribute of triplicity for the Triple Powered One alone, and the attribute of maleness only for the Barbelo Aeon (X 4,10b-12; 8,26-29; 9,1-3), and because it assigns the salvific function of the Triple Male as found in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* to Autogenes acting through Sophia.

The figure of the Triple Male Child seems to be the result of a history of a developing tradition. The earlier Sethian treatises such as the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (and the later *Three Steles of Seth*) use the term "Triple Male" exclusively as an epithet of Barbelo, the Mother of the Autogenes Son. Then in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, we are introduced to the separate figure of the Triple Male "Child" who, as the offspring of (the triple male) Barbelo, is now identified with the "great Christ" and "Telmaêl Telma(cha)êl Hêli Hêli Machar Machar Seth," while the figure of Autogenes is identified with the Logos and demoted to the rank of the Son of "the great Christ" (IV 60,1-8) where he cooperates with divine Adamas and his consort Meirothea to bring "the great Seth" into being (III 49,16-51,22). Furthermore, in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the repetitive doxologies (e.g., IV 59,13-29; III 49,22-50,17; 53,12-54,6; 55,16-56,3; 61,23-62,11) that punctuate each stage of its theogony place the Triple Male Child (cf. "the Triple Male Child of the great Christ whom the great Invisible Spirit has anointed" in III 44,22-28) in the position normally assigned to the self-generated (Autogenes) Son of Barbelo in the theogonies of the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Since the latter two works identify the Autogenes as Christ, it is clear that the figure of Christ is the independent variable, indicating that Christian interpretation of the supreme Sethian triad was the principal reason for this demotion of Autogenes.[42] Furthermore, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* develops a new father-mother-child triad consisting of the Triple-Male Child, his consort Youel, and their Child of the Child Ephesech (or Esephech). By placing the figure of Autogenes as the lowest of the three subaeons of the Barbelo Aeon, the Platonizing Sethian treatises represent a continuation of his demotion. As a result, the Father-Mother-Child nomenclature for the supreme triad disappears from later Sethian theology.

Among the Platonizing Sethian treatises, the Triple Male Child seems to represent a further stage in the reconceptualization of Barbelo from a Mother figure into a tripartite—masculine—universal intellect. While *Marsanes* seems to omit all mention of the Triple Male Child and the *Three Steles of Seth* merely address Barbelo as Triple Male and Child,

41. As B. LAYTON correctly saw in his translation in *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 153-4, the conclusion of the first stele of the *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 120,17-121,16) is a hymn of praise on the part of Seth and his father Pigeradamas directed, not to Autogenes, but to Barbelo, for it is only she that could be considered an "ingenerately generated" Triple Male, "given in triple power," and to have been "divided everywhere while remaining one," even "divided into the pentad" (cf. *Ap. John* II 5,5-10; 6,2-10). As in the *Apocryphon of John*, so also in the *Three Steles of Seth*, the Aeon of Barbelo *as a whole* is addressed as Triple Male. On the other hand, the fact that *Three Steles* states that, as Triple Male, Barbelo "caused the truly existent masculinities to be triple male" and has "gone forth for the sake of what is inferior" as "a word from a command" (VII 120,17-28; later the second Stele says that Barbelo "appeared to them all as a word," 123,10-11) suggests that the term Triple Male designates that (demiurgical) phase or aspect (Logos) of the Barbelo Aeon that can interact with the sensible cosmos, and as such can be identified with Autogenes. Likewise the first Stele virtually conflates Autogenes with Pigeradamas—thus *Zostrianos* (VIII 6,22-25; 13,4-6) calls Adamas the eye of Autogenes and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 49,16-19; 65,13-15) identifies Autogenes as the Logos, who is conflated ("mingled") with Adamas (cf. J. Goehring, "Introduction to VII,5 the Three Steles of Seth," in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. B. A. Pearson [Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 30. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996], 376-377).

42. In all these cases, Christianization has caused the third member of the supreme divine triad to be designated as Christ rather than Autogenes, who is demoted to a lower level, even though he still tends to be regarded as the father of Adamas. Perhaps one may postulate that the theogony underlying both the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus once envisioned a supreme deity Man, whose offspring, the Son of Man, was regarded as self-begotten (αὐτογενής) from an unnamed source that later became identified as the Father's first Thought, in effect giving rise to the divine Father, Mother, Son triad.

Zostrianos and *Allogenes* portray the Triple Male Child as a somewhat mobile savior figure within the first two levels—Protophanes and Autogenes—of the Barbelo Aeon (who herself still occasionally bears the epithet "Triple Male"). These treatises link this Child with the "perfect male Mind" Protophanes to the extent that he is associated with "those who exist together" in the Protophanes subaeon, but also with Autogenes, to the extent that he is associated with the self-generated "individuals" dwelling in the Autogenes subaeon; his link to Kalyptos is the most remote of all.

First, the Triple Male is frequently associated with Protophanes. In *Allogenes*, the Triple Male is located between Protophanes and Autogenes at XI 45,28-46,11; 46,11-34; and 58,12-26, but below Autogenes in 51,32-37. In XI 45,34-37 (cf. 46,11-34), it is said that Barbelo is Triple Male insofar as she grants power to the "individuals" (within whom Protophanes acts; XI 51,19-24). Later on, in *Allogenes* XI 58,12-26, the perfect Triple Male Child is the Savior whose goodness is "the noetic perfect Protophanes-Harmedon." A similar association is implied in *Zostrianos* VIII 59,25-63,20: Zostrianos is baptized, coming into being as truly existing and then is brought by Youel into the aeonic place of the Triple Male and sees the "invisible Child," after which Youel places him before Protophanes, to be instructed by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon.

Second, the Triple Male Child is sometimes closely associated with Autogenes. Likewise, the doxology of *Zostrianos* VIII 13,1-6 blesses Pigeradamas as the "eye of the Perfect Child" exactly where one would expect the name of Autogenes (on the other hand the *Apocryphon of John* II 8,28-9,2 calls Pigeradamas "the first appearance"). *Allogenes* (XI 55,35-56,14) also characterizes the Triple Male as beyond substance and as the one in whom the self-generated ones dwell, suggesting close association with Autogenes. His link with the "self-generated ones," (i.e., those inhabiting the "Self-generated Aeons" of *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*) and his characterization as "self-generated," suggest that *Allogenes* regards the Triple Male as essentially a double of Autogenes:

> **XI 55** [33] [And then] [34] [the] all-[glorious] One, Youel, said to me: [35] "While the [Triple] Male [36] [is a self-generated entity [37] beyond] substance, [38] the [...] is [insubstantiality] **56** [1] [...] [2] [...] [3] [...] [4] [...] [5] [...] [6] [...] [7] [...] [8] [...] [9] ... [...] [10] those who exist [in association] [11] with the [generation of those] [12] who [truly] exist. [13] The self-generated ones dwell [14] with the [Triple Male]."

Third, there are also passages that envision a close relationship between all three figures: the Triple Male Child and both Protophanes and Autogenes. Thus according to *Allogenes* (XI 46,11-34), Autogenes sees the contents of the Barbelo Aeon as "all existing individually"; however, when "[they] become as he is, [they shall] see the divine Triple Male ... the Thought of all those who exist together"; thereupon, if the Triple Male contemplates them, he contemplates Protophanes, the procession or path from "those who exist together" to "those who truly exist," whom to see is to see Kalyptos, and indeed Barbelo herself. In *Zostrianos*, the status of this Triple Male is somewhat ambiguous: his existence is in Kalyptos, he is a type and form and thought of Protophanes, a power and form of Autogenes, a perfect individual as well as a being and knowledge of the individuals, and a power of Barbelo.[43]

Although the reconstructions are by no means certain, *Zostrianos* (VIII 40,6-16) appears to coordinate the Triple Male Child with both the three powers of the Invisible Spirit and the three subaeons of the Barbelo Aeon. The Triple Male Child on a lower level possesses nearly the same powers as does the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit, although mediated by Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes. The correspondences (Kalyptos–Existence, Protophanes–Knowledge, Autogenes–Mentality) are not exact, since one might expect Autogenes, "the third of those aeons," to correspond with Vitality (cf. VIII 15,1-17) rather than Mentality; one must however allow for some ambiguity, since the order of the Existence, Vitality, Mentality triad varies in this treatise.[44]

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43. Given the additional statement in *Allogenes* (XI 51,31-37) that the Aeon of Barbelo "is endowed with the divine Triple Male as an integration of them all with the Invisible Spirit; he is a rational expression of deliberation, the perfect Child," one might conclude that it is the Triple Male who guarantees the preservation or integrity or "inviolate being" of all the inhabitants of the Aeon of Barbelo, and perhaps serves as a collective designation for that Aeon as collectively constituted by Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes (in the sense of the fourth entity in a series who functions to recapitulate the reality of the preceding three; for instances of such a scheme, see *Zostrianos* VIII 18,14-21; 19,9-14; 56,19-23; 119,18-24; and 125,17-22 and *Marsanes* X 3,25-4,2 discussed in the previous section on "Autogenes—and Sophia?"). Thus, just as the term "Triple-Powered One" serves to designate the three modalities of the Invisible Spirit (Existence, Vitality and Mentality), so also the term "Triple-Male (Child)" might serve to designate the Aeon of Barbelo as a kind of tripartite Mind of the Invisible Spirit.

44. One notes however, that by containing those who are unified ("dwell together"), the Triple Male Child is most closely identified here with Protophanes, even though VIII 2,22-23 names Kalyptos as his "god."

> **VIII 40** [6] [His (the Triple Male's)] Knowledge [is Protophanes], [7] [the invisible] [8] [perfect male Mind. And] [9] he has [his own Existence] [10] within [the] ingenerate [Kalyptos]. [11] [He possesses the] [12] third [of those aeons], [13] [since he] possesses [Mentality]. [14] And he [contains those who] [15] dwell together [in order that they become] [16] all-perfect [and blessed].

Functionally, the Triple Male seems to be a kind of transitional or transformational figure who mediates between the levels of being presided over by Protophanes and Autogenes. Since the distinction between the "perfect individuals" in Autogenes and "the all-perfect ones who exist together" in Protophanes is rather slight, the Triple Male Child fits in nicely as sort of mediator between them. In *Allogenes* (XI 58,12-26; cf. 51,34-35), this mediating function of the Triple Male also qualifies him for the title of Savior (although *Zostrianos* VIII 13,27-28 awards that title to Ephesech Child of the Child; the reference of "savior" in VIII 47,6-11 is ambiguous). J. Finamore has suggested the following function of the Triple Male in *Allogenes*:[45]

> The third level [of the Barbelo Aeon] is that of the Triple Male. This entity is closely related to the "individuals" (45.36-37), that is, individual Forms and souls that actually reside in the Autogenes aeon. He is also placed beneath "those who exist together," that is the undifferentiated Forms and souls that reside in Protophanes: "[He is] the [Thought (ἔννοια)] of all those who [exist] together" (46.20-22). Further, just as to see any of the "hidden ones" in Kalyptos is to see Barbelo (46.32-34), so too to see the Triple Male is to see Protophanes (46.22-25). Thus, he occupies the ontological level just below Protophanes and acts to bring the undifferentiated beings there into differentiated existence in the level of Autogenes. And, conversely, he helps the differentiated souls in Autogenes to ascend to the higher realms. Thus, at 58.13-15 he is called a savior.

By identifying the Triple Male as the third of the Barbelo aeons and displacing Autogenes to a hypothetical fourth aeon, Finamore interprets the Barbelo Aeon as tetradic in structure. However, since none of the Sethian Platonizing treatises define the Triple Male according to a specific ontological level as they do in the cases of Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes, but rather treat him as an intermediary figure who enables ontic transitions between the two lowest of the three ontological

45. J. FINAMORE, "Iamblichus, the Sethians, and *Marsanes*," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 231.

levels (the authentic existents, the unified, and the individuals), one ought to regard the Barbelo Aeon as essentially triadic rather than tetradic in nature, despite the Triple Male's important mediating function.

The absence of the Triple Male Child as a distinct figure in *Marsanes* seems to accord with earlier Sethian views of salvation through the descent of a savior rather than by a transcendental ascent of the one to be saved (though the net result of either is the same). In the earlier Sethian treatises, the saving descent is accomplished by the Mother Barbelo in various guises, one of which—the Epinoia of Light—seems to be identified with Sophia. For *Marsanes*, this descent seems to be accomplished by Autogenes, who apparently does not descend in his own person, but rather extends salvation to the "Fourth" through the agency of Sophia. Thus the essential salvific function of the Triple Male Child is retained by Autogenes, who, like the Triple Male Child in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, generally operates within the confines of the Barbelo Aeon. *Marsanes*, even though it has abandoned the Father-Mother-Child supreme triad of the earlier treatises in favor of the Platonizing noetic tripartitioning of the Barbelo Aeon and a "demiurgical" interpretation of Autogenes, nevertheless maintains the distinctiveness of the third member of the triad as an expression of an older Sethian paradigm of salvation by a descending revealer-redeemer figure.

F. Concluding Observations on the Complexity of the Barbelo Aeon

It is obvious that Barbelo was the subject of intensive Sethian speculation and innovation. Throughout the Sethian tradition, she has accumulated many doubles or alter-egos, not to mention her many alternate names, such as Mother, Mother-Father, Ennoia, Pronoia, Protennoia, Incorruptibility, Silence, Womb, and so on. Among her lower doubles or alter-egos already noted, one finds: Epinoia, (Eve-)Zôê, Youel (or Yoel, both from Yaoel?), Meirothea mother of Adamas, Prophania mother of Seth and the Four Luminaries (probably a feminine analogy to the Son Protophanes), Plesithea mother of the angelic seed of Seth, Sophia or Epinoia the mother of the Creator, and (Sophia's restored aspect) Metanoia, and probably others. These beings function as Barbelo's projection beyond her own Aeon.

In the course of time, Barbelo's alter-egos became organized as the mother figures in a whole series of Father-Mother-Child triads, for example, the theogonical table for the *Gospel of the Egyptians* in

Chapter 4 suggests an interlocking web of six to nine such "family triads":

1. the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo, the Triple Male Child–Great Christ;
2. the Triple-male Child, the virgin Youel and the Child of the Child Esephech;
3. the "Spirit" (?), Pronoia, and the Autogenes Logos;
4. the Self-begotten Word, Mirothoe, and Adamas;
5. Adamas, Prophania, and Seth and the Four Luminaries;
6. Seth, Plesithea, and the seed of Seth;
7. Eleleth with Gamaliel and Gabriel, the Hylic Sophia Cloud, Saklas and Nebruel;
8. Hormos, Metanoia, and the early Sethites; and possibly
9. Logos (?), Edokla, and the Truth and Justice of the Sethites.[46]

Likewise, Barbelo's attributes were grouped in triads: Prognosis, Aphtharsia, Aionia Zoe, or on analogy with these terms Existence (cf. Aphtharsia), Life (Aionia Zoe) and Mind (cf. Prognosis), or—if one counts also the "Truth" of the *Apocryphon of John* II 5,32-6,2—even into a tetrad. Of course, the development of such triads was encouraged by Neopythagorean arithmological and Platonic noological speculation, such that Barbelo and her hypostatized triadic attributes could be viewed as the divine Intellect of the Supreme Father, tripartitioned along the lines of Middle Platonists such as Numenius into a contemplated Intellect, a contemplating Intellect and a creative Intellect. Philosophical speculation—perhaps of Stoic provenance—on the relationship of the divine Thought, Intellect and Logos probably underlies the *Trimorphic Protennoia*'s conception of Barbelo as the divine Thought manifesting itself progressively as inarticulate Voice, verbal Speech, and fully discursive Word (Logos). Naturally this could lead to conflicts between certain Sethian mythologumena (with their traditional inertia) and newly adopted ontological schemes. Thus in *Allogenes*, *Marsanes*, *Zostrianos*, and the *Three Steles of Seth*, Barbelo is partitioned into Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes, while *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and to some extent *Zostrianos*, admit a fourth being into the Aeon of Barbelo, the Triple Male (Child). In order to preserve the triadic noological scheme influencing these treatises, this Triple Male is associated now with Protophanes, now with Autogenes, or even with both.

46. A possible eighth triad consists of the couple Autogenes Logos and Edokla, who produce the race of morally good human beings who, though not descendants of Seth, are guided by Truth and Justice, unlike the corrupt seed of Cain; cf. the 400,000 descendants of Ham and Japheth in the *Apocalypse of Adam*. See also A. BÖHLIG, "Triad und Trinität," in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*. Vol. II: Sethian Gnosticism., ed. B. Layton (Supplements to *Numen* 41; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), 617-634.

The earlier Sethian treatises present the Mother Barbelo as chief actor, the principal initiator and agent of enlightenment and salvation. She is ranked immediately after the supreme deity and is the source of the aeonic world. Most importantly, she is ultimately the Mother of those Gnostics to whom she descends, enlightens and receives back into the divine world. She is the receptive principle par excellence; no more fitting designation could be given her than to be identified as the Mother member of Plato's supreme triad of first principles. Like Plato's Receptacle, her seed could only hope to live by being reintegrated within her, the Womb of the All. But the Platonizing Sethian treatises have transformed the Mother Barbelo into the masculine Aeon of Barbelo: as *Marsanes* (X 9,1-2) puts it, "the Virgin became male." No longer a divine Mother descending in saving visitations bearing the baptismal enlightenment of the Five Seals, Barbelo now remains above as a divine Intellect, beckoning Sethians to learn a technique of self-performable ecstatic visionary ascent vouchsafed to them long ago by Seth or Allogenes or Zostrianos or Marsanes or Nicotheos or others.[47]

While in the Pronoia monologue of the *Apocryphon of John*, Barbelo personally admonishes her fallen seed to awaken from sleep, her portrayal in the Platonizing Sethian treatises as the exalted divine Intellect is much less personal. Only *Marsanes* portrays the Aeon of Barbelo speaking directly to Marsanes, telling him to engage in silent contemplation of yet higher realities (X 8,18b-29) and informing him about the nature of the silent praise her aeon offered to the Triple Powered One on the occasion of its original manifestation (X 9,21-28). Even more striking is her direct address to Marsanes' followers through the figure of Marsanes (who has become assimilated to Barbelo as the Triple Powered One's third power) as her mouthpiece, beckoning them to ascend above with the Invisible Spirit/Triple Powered One as they contemplate yet higher realities (X 10,12b-29).

47. For the stages by which this may have happened, see esp. Chapter 7, n. 27.

Moreover, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes* clearly envisage a dynamic process of ontological transformations among the ideal and psychic entities that occupy the three subaeons of the Barbelo Aeon: particulars are elevated to the rank of universals and universals descend to the ranks of particulars, apparently by a process of contemplation. Thus the *contents* of these subaeons enjoy a certain mobility as they are promoted and demoted, while the subaeons themselves remain stable and immobile. But in *Marsanes*, it is the divine beings that enjoy this mobility, much as in the earlier Sethian treatises. Although the Barbelo Aeon itself maintains its place, it is instead Autogenes—almost as if he were no longer an integral component of the Barbelo Aeon—who is said to "[extend to]" the self-generated ones below him, and, through the instrumentality of Sophia, even to "extend to the Fourth" (X 3,25-4,2). Even the Invisible Spirit, whose immobility is emphasized in all other Sethian treatises, is portrayed by *Marsanes* as "going forth" and "running up" to his place (X 9,29-10,7, probably in the form of his "second power," the Triple Powered One). *Marsanes* seems to reverse the tendency to de-personalize the higher entities that accompanies the Platonizing treatises' shift away from the florid heavenly liturgies and accounts of Barbelo's gracious and "caring" salvific initiatives in earlier Sethian treatises toward preoccupation with the rather more abstruse, immobile, ineffable, and somewhat only negatively conceptualized higher realities of the later Sethian treatises. In these respects, *Marsanes* tends to recapture the mythological dynamism of earlier Sethian treatises.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE DIVINE AND COSMIC HIERARCHY OF THE PLATONIZING SETHIAN TREATISES: II

I. Psychic and Natural Realms Below the Barbelo Aeon

In addition to the realm of pure, determinate being defined by the Barbelo Aeon and its suprajacent source in the Invisible Spirit, who is altogether beyond being, the Platonizing Sethian treatises reckon with two more ontological levels, the realm of souls and the sensible realm. These realms are not articulated in *Allogenes*, which seems to include incorporeal souls within the Barbelo Aeon, and refers to the levels below the Barbelo Aeon merely as "Nature." The other treatises conceive this lower realm as comprising two ontological levels, a psychic level containing three realms of incorporeal souls, and below that, a sensible and corporeal level that apparently extends from the fixed stars to the earth itself (the realms that *Allogenes* calls "Nature"). According to *Zostrianos*, *Marsanes*, and Codex Bruce, *Untitled*, these realms are articulated into five distinct levels, each populated with various kinds of souls and spiritual beings. These are the realms most directly accessible to human experience and their members constitute the basic object of the salvific activity of the divine Autogenes. They are here enumerated according to their rank in the thirteen-seal hierarchy of *Marsanes*:

1. the Self-begotten Aeons = "Seal" 6 (in *Zostrianos*, apparently consisting of four levels defined by the Four Luminaries and traditionally populated by Adamas, Seth, the seed of Seth and the repentant souls; these are essentially purified, disembodied souls),
2. the Repentance = "Seal" 5 (in *Zostrianos*, containing souls of those who sin yet repent),
3. the Sojourn = "Seal" 4 (in *Zostrianos*, containing souls who are not self-directed, but follow the ways of others),
4. "Seal" 3 (in *Zostrianos*, the Aeonic Copies of the preceding three levels, apparently located in the realm between the moon and the fixed stars),

5. "Seal" 2 (in *Zostrianos*, the atmospheric realm ["Airy earth"], apparently the realm defined by earth's surface and the planetary orbits; souls here are disembodied, but not purified of their "psychic accretions"), and finally
6. "Seal" 1 (in *Zostrianos*, the earthly, corporeal realm with its own thirteen aeons presided over by the Archon of creation).

Zostrianos seems to locate level (1), the Self-generated Aeons, within the Barbelo Aeon as its lowest level, while *Marsanes* seems to regard it as a distinct level below the Barbelo Aeon. Furthermore, *Marsanes* seems to treat levels (2) and (3) in tandem[1] and conflates levels (4), (5) and (6) into a single "cosmic and material"—i.e., corporeal—category. Among the four treatises, it is only *Zostrianos* that treats the corporeal realm in any detail, by tracing the origin of the Matter from which the Archon shapes this corporeal realm to the downward inclination of Sophia (VIII 9,2-10,20). While the figure of Sophia is a central feature of the earlier Sethian treatises, it seems to play no role at all in the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Allogenes*; her possible salvific role in *Marsanes* has been discussed in connection with the figure of Autogenes treated in Chapter 12.

The most complete and succinct inventory of these levels and their inhabitants comes from the last extant pages of the *Untitled* text of the Bruce Codex (263,11-264,6 [Schmidt-MacDermot]).[2] Here, the offspring created out of matter by the supreme mother's self-begotten demiurgic son play the role of the younger gods of Plato's *Timaeus*, requesting that he send them shaping principles (rather like λόγοι σπερματικοί) for the ordering of the material realm:

> **LX** [29] He (the self-begotten son) heard them (his offspring) and sent [30] discriminating [31] powers that know the structure of [32] the Hidden Aeons; he sent them [33] forth in accord with the structure of the Hidden ones [34] and imposed order according to the transcendent order [35] and according to the Hidden structure. [36] They began from the bottom up **LXI** [1] so that the construction might fit [2] together:
>
> Now he created the atmospheric [3] realm as
> a dwelling place for those who [4] came forth that
> they might abide in it until [5] the confirmation of those below them. [6]
> Next, the true Sojourn; [7]
> within this, the place of the (true) Repentance; [8]
> within this, the (true) Atmospheric [9] Copies.
> Next, [10] the Sojourn;
> the Repentance; [11]
> within this, the Self-generated [12] Copies in that place. [13]
>
> They were baptized in the name of the Autogenes, [14] the God over them. [15]
> And they placed powers [16] there over the Spring [17] of Living Water, who were [18] brought forth as they came. These [19] are the names of the powers over [20] the Living Water:
> Michar, [21] Micheus; and
> they (the waters) are purified by [22] Barpharanges.
> And [23] within these, the Aeons of Sophia; [24]
> within these the real [25] Truth.

1. *Marsanes* X 2,26-27 ("The fourth [and the] fifth which is above") together with X 3,14-17 lumps together seals four and five, which correspond to the levels of the Sojourn and Repentance in *Zostrianos*. As incorporeal, immortal, and divine but not cosmic (κοσμικός) or noetic (νοητός), one would suppose that these two constitute a realm intermediate between the perceptible and intelligible, which for Platonism is generally the realm of soul, particularly of disembodied souls in the period between bodily incarnations. As discussed in Chapter 12 ("Autogenes—and Sophia?"), the "Fourth" is the destination and object of Autogenes' salvific extension through the instrumentality of Sophia, which suggests—though it is never stated by the Platonizing Sethian treatises—that the "Fifth" might be the abode of Sophia.

2. Codex Bruce, *Untitled* LX-LXI [Baynes] = MS. f. 136r-136v = 49-50 [Schmidt] = 263,11-264,6 [Schmidt-MacDermot]: LX [29] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲫⲥⲱⲧⲙ ⲉⲣⲟⲟⲩ ⲁⲫⲧⲛⲛⲟ [30] ⲟⲩ ⲛⲍⲉⲛⲁⲩⲛⲁⲙⲓⲥ ⲛⲣⲉⲫⲁⲓⲁⲕⲣⲓ [31] ⲛⲉ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲉⲧⲥⲟⲟⲩⲛ ⲙⲡⲧⲱⲟ̄ ⲛ [32] ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲉⲑⲏⲡ ⲁⲫⲧⲛⲛⲟⲟⲩⲥⲟⲩ [33] ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲡⲧⲱⲟ̄ ⲛⲛⲉⲑⲏⲡ [34] ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲫⲥⲙⲛ ⲧⲁⲍⲓⲥ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲛⲧⲁ [35] ⲍⲓⲥ ⲙⲡⲭⲓⲥⲉ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲕⲁ<ⲧⲁ> ⲡⲧⲱⲟ̄ [36] ⲉⲑⲏⲡ ⲁⲩⲁⲣⲭⲓ ⲭⲓⲛ ⲙⲡⲉⲥⲏⲧ ⲱⲁ LXI [1] ⲍⲣⲁⲓ ⲭⲉⲕⲁⲁⲥ ⲉⲣⲉⲡⲕⲱⲧ ⲛⲁⲧⲱⲱⲙⲉ [2] ⲉⲛⲉⲫⲉⲣⲏⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲫⲧⲁⲙⲓⲟ ⲙⲡⲕⲁⲍ [3] ⲛⲁⲏⲣ ⲙⲙⲁ ⲛⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲛⲉⲛⲧⲁⲩ [4] ⲉⲓ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲭⲉ ⲉ(ⲧ)<ⲩ>ⲉⲃⲱ ⲍⲓⲭⲱⲫ ⲱⲁⲛ [5] ⲧⲁⲭⲣⲟ ⲛⲛⲉⲧⲙⲡⲉⲥⲏⲧ ⲙⲙⲟⲟⲩ [6] ⲙⲛⲛⲥⲱⲥ ⲡⲙⲁ ⲛⲟⲟⲉⲓⲗⲉ ⲛⲁⲙⲉ [7] ⲙⲡⲍⲟⲩⲛ ⲙⲡⲁⲓ ⲡⲙⲁ ⲛⲧⲙⲉⲧⲁ [8] ⲛⲟⲓⲁ ⲙⲡⲍⲟⲩⲛ ⲙⲡⲁⲓ ⲛⲁⲛⲧⲓ [9] ⲧⲩⲡⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲉⲣⲟⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲙⲛⲛⲥⲱⲥ [10] ⲧⲡⲁⲣⲟⲓⲕⲏⲥⲓⲥ ⲧⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛⲟⲓⲁ [11] ⲙⲡⲍⲟⲩⲛ ⲙⲡⲁⲓ ⲛⲁⲛⲧⲓⲧⲩⲡⲟⲥ [12] ⲛⲁⲩⲧⲟⲅⲉⲛⲏⲥ ⲍⲙ ⲡⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲙ [13] ⲙⲁⲩ ⲱⲁⲩⲭⲱⲕⲙ ⲉⲡⲣⲁⲛ ⲙⲡⲁⲩ [14] ⲧⲟⲅⲉⲛⲏⲥ ⲡⲉⲧⲟ ⲛⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲉ [15] ⲭⲱⲟⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲁⲩⲕⲱ ⲛⲍⲉⲛⲟⲟⲙ [16] ⲙⲡⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲙⲙⲁⲩ ⲍⲓⲭⲛ ⲧⲡⲏ [17] ⲅⲏ ⲙⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲱⲛⲍ ⲛⲁⲓ ⲉⲛ [18] ⲧⲁⲩⲛⲧⲟⲩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲉⲩⲛⲏⲩ ⲛⲁⲓ [19] ⲛⲉ ⲛⲣⲁⲛ ⲛⲛⲟⲙ ⲉⲧⲍⲓⲭⲙ [20] ⲡⲙⲟⲟⲩ ⲉⲧⲟⲛⲍ ⲙⲓⲭⲁⲣ ⲙⲛ [21] ⲙⲓⲭⲉⲩ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲱⲁⲩⲧⲃⲃⲟⲟⲩ ⲍⲓ [22] ⲧⲛ ⲃⲁⲣⲫⲁⲣⲁⲅⲅⲏⲥ ⲁⲩⲱ ⲙ [23] ⲡⲍⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲛⲁⲓ ⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲛⲧⲥⲟ [24] ⲫⲓⲁ ⲙⲡⲍⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲛⲁⲓ ⲧⲁⲗⲏⲑⲓⲁ [25] ⲛⲁⲙⲉ ⲉⲣⲉⲧ-ⲡⲓⲥⲧ<ⲓⲥ> ⲥⲟⲫⲓⲁ ⲙ [26] ⲙⲁⲩ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲉⲡⲣⲟⲱⲛⲧⲟⲥ ⲓⲥ [27] ⲡⲉⲧⲟⲛⲍ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲁ-ⲉⲣⲟⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ [28] ⲡⲉⲫⲙⲛⲧⲥⲛⲟⲟⲩⲥ ⲛⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ [29] ⲁⲩⲕⲱ ⲙⲡⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲙⲙⲁⲩ ⲛⲥⲉⲗⲗⲁⲱ [30] ⲙⲛ ⲉⲗⲉⲓⲛⲟⲥ ⲙⲛ ⲍⲱⲣⲉⲛⲉⲑⲁⲏⲥ [31] ⲙⲛ ⲥⲉⲗⲙⲉⲗⲭⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲡⲁⲩⲧⲟ [32] ⲣⲉⲛⲏⲥ ⲛⲛⲁⲓⲱⲛ ⲁⲩⲕⲱ ⲛⲍⲏ [33] ⲧⲫ ⲛⲧⲟⲟⲩ ⲙⲫⲱⲥⲧⲏⲣ [34] ⲏⲗⲏⲗⲏⲑ ⲗⲁⲩⲉⲓⲗⲉ ⲱⲣⲟⲓⲁⲏⲗ <ⲁⲣⲙⲟⲍⲏⲗ>.

There are there Pistis Sophia [26] and
the pre-existent Jesus: [27] the one who lives, the atmospheric one, and [28]
his twelve Aeons; [29]
placed there were Sel<d>ao [30] and Eleinos and Zogenethlos [31] and Selmelche<l> and the [32] Self-generated Aeons, and
within [33] it were placed the Four Luminaries [34]
Eleleth, Davei<th>e, Oroiael, [**LXII** [1] and Armozel ...].

Since these lower levels of reality are for the most part merely mentioned in passing by *Marsanes*, a closer understanding of them can often be gleaned only from the more detailed account in *Zostrianos*, where their structure is summarized during Zostrianos' initial ascent to the Self-generated Aeons (VIII 5,17-6,7a) and the nature of their content is subsequently explained by Authrounios (VIII 11,2b-13,6) and Ephesech (VIII 26,19b-44,22a) with particular reference to the destiny of souls. In *Zostrianos*, the realms below the Barbelo Aeon are inhabited by apparently disembodied souls during the period between their various incarnations; they each represent different levels of spiritual attainment beyond ordinary human existence, which is normally confined to the corporeal realm and its "thirteen aeons." Much as *Marsanes* characterizes each of these levels as "seals," *Zostrianos* marks each level (here italicized) by distinctive baptisms appointed for those who achieve a particular level.

VIII 24 [30] Now if [31] [one] strips off the world **25** [1] and lays aside [nature], [2] whether one is a *sojourner* without [3] dwelling place or power, [4] following the practices of [5] others, or whether one *repents*, [6] having committed no sin, [7] being satisfied with knowledge (and) [8] without concern for anything (worldly), [9] baptisms are appointed [10] respectively for these: (There is) the path [11] into the *Self-generated ones*, the one [12] in which you have now been baptized each [13] time, which is appropriate for seeing the [perfect] [14] individuals—it is a knowledge [15] of everything, having originated [16] from the powers of the Self-generated ones. [17] (There is) the one you will perform when you transfer [18] to the all-perfect aeons. [19] When you wash in the third [20] baptism, [then] you will hear [21] about those [that] truly [exist] [22] in [that] place.

Souls therefore ascend from the sensible realms (the atmospheric realm and the Aeonic Copies), to the psychic realms (the Sojourn and the Repentance) through the Barbelo Aeon, where they become "perfect individuals" in the Self-generated Aeons belonging to Autogenes (so too in *Marsanes* X 3,18-25), "all-perfect ones" in the Protophanes Aeon, and "those who truly exist" in the Kalyptos Aeon (VIII 24,30-25,22).

Although they all include realms for disembodied souls, it is both interesting and significant that none of the Sethian treatises except *Marsanes* (X 21,20-24: "the celestial soul," see below and Chapter 14) posit a separate hypostasis of Soul as did Plotinus and subsequent Neoplatonists. Instead, they place disembodied souls in the realms presided over by Autogenes: either in the Four Luminaries as in the *Apocryphon of John*, or in the Self-generated Aeons, Repentance, and Sojourn as in *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*, or else they merely presuppose their presence in the aeon of Autogenes, as in *Allogenes* and perhaps the *Three Steles of Seth*.

A. The Self-generated Aeons

According to the more detailed accounts in *Zostrianos*, the Self-generated Aeons consist of four (sub)aeons of the Barbelo Aeon that contain perfect individuals who have not yet attained the "all-perfection" of complete unification (VIII 18,11-21). At this point, they apparently "exist by species, genus, whole, and partial difference" (VIII 19,1-2)—they have only a partial, not a primary form. Although they can be distinguished by type, all the perfect individuals possess "self-generated power," eternal life and a "logos of the truth." Each of the four subaeons of the Self-generated Aeons is presided over by one of the Four Luminaries—never mentioned in *Marsanes*—who function as "λόγοι of truth and knowledge" for the Barbelo Aeon (VIII 29,1-21; 127,19-128,7).[3] In addition to the Luminaries and perfect individuals,

3. In both *Zostrianos* (VIII 6,31-32; 51,11-12) and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 51,14-22), Prophania serves as the mother of the Four Luminaries. Resident in each Light are the traditional progenitors and ancestors of the "immovable race" of the Sethians, who form a special object of praise during Zostrianos' baptism in the name of Autogenes (VIII 6,21-7,1; cf. 51,7-18): Pigeradamas, the first perfect human, "eye" of Autogenes together with his mother Meirothea; Seth Emmacha Seth, son of Pigeradamas and father of the immovable race together with Prophania the mother of both Seth and the Four Luminaries; and the primordial seed of Seth together with their mother Plesithea. Although not described in *Zostrianos*, the lowest of the Four Luminaries, Eleleth—at least to judge from the *Apocryphon of John* (II 9,19-22)—would contain souls of morally serious persons who are ignorant of the Pleroma, but after some delay, finally repent. Or it may be that *Zostrianos* assigns such repentant souls to the level of the Repentance immediately below the Self-generated Aeons. Like the Kalyptos Aeon (VIII 113,1-117,14) and presumably—given the damaged state of the text—the Protophanes Aeon, the Self-generated Aeons also contain an entire ideal world (a living earth, water, and air, immutable

the Self-generated Aeons contain numerous glories, salvific helpers who are "conceptual paradigms of salvation" that are stamped upon the mind of anyone desirous of salvation, thereby assisting one's ascent through the world and the aeons above (VIII 46,15-31). It is possible that the author of *Marsanes* had these glories in mind when he speaks (X 4,21-26) of a certain "sense-perceptible [power]" that hides those who will rest and keeps them from "the passions and division [of the] union."

In *Marsanes*, the Self-generated Aeons represent either the extreme periphery of the Barbelo Aeon, or else the very first ontological level below the Barbelo Aeon. As the name implies, it is presided over by the divine Autogenes ("self-generated one").

> **X 3** [18] But the sixth (seal), [19] concerning the self-generated ones (αὐτογέννητοι), [20] concerning the incorporeal being (οὐσία) [21] that exists individually (κατὰ μέρος), [22] together with those who abide in [23] the truth of the All [in regard to] [24] understanding (ἐπιστήμη) and [25] stability.

These "self-generated ones" must refer to the beings that inhabit what *Zostrianos* calls the Self-generated Aeons over which the divine Autogenes presides. Although *Marsanes* neither treats the nature of these Self-generated Aeons in any great detail nor refers to them as "aeons," their self-generated inhabitants nevertheless become the focus of the redemptive activity of Autogenes:

> **X 6** [2] He (Autogenes) descended, again he descended [3] <from> the Unbegotten One [4] who is insubstantial, who [5] is the Spirit. The one (Autogenes) who exists [6] before all of them (the realms below the Barbelo Aeon) extends [7] [to the divine] self-generated ones. [8] The one who is [9] [substantial (Autogenes)] examines [10] [the all (the Barbelo Aeon)] and is [11] [the all and] resembles [12] [the all]. And from [13] [the single one] they [are] divided, [14] [so that] I experienced [15] many things, it being manifest [16] that he saved a multitude.

As cause of both division and restoration, Autogenes plays a role similar to Numenius' second God. As pointed out in Chapters 9 and 12, the

creatures, trees, plants and fruits, souls, intellects, gods and angels; VIII 47,27-48,29; 55,13-25), all very reminiscent of similar descriptions in Plato (*Phaedo* 113D-114C, *Gorgias* 523A-6C, *Phaedrus* 248C-249C, *Republic* X 614B-621B) and Plotinus (*Ennead* VI, 2 [43] 21-2 and V, 8 [31] 3-4). Finally, the Autogenes Aeon also seems to contain various other figures, some associated with the Sethian baptismal rite, such as Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus, Micheus, Michar, Barpharanges, Seldao, Elenos, and Zogenethlos, as well as some of the principal revealer figures, Ephesech and Authrounios.

alternating contemplative and demiurgical activities of Numenius' second (or second and third) God have a direct impact on human life:

> Our journey begins when the divine intellect is sent on a traversal (ἐν διεξόδῳ) to all those appointed to share in it; whenever the (second) God looks and turns toward each of us, the consequence is that life (ζῆν) results and bodies live (βιώσκεσθαι), tended by God's far-shooting rays. Yet whenever he turns again towards his watchtower, all this is extinguished, while the (divine) Mind continues to live a blissful life. (ζῆν βίου εὐδαίμονος; Numenius, frg. 12 des Places).

Allogenes specifies a similar alternation in the activity of Autogenes: in XI 46,14-16, upon his emanation within the Barbelo Aeon, Autogenes "saw them (the ὄντως ὄντα or Forms in the Barbelo Aeon) [all] existing individually just as [they] are," that is, his vision of the universals results in their individuation. Subsequently, he directs his attention downward toward "Nature," the realm over which he presides:

> **XI 51** [25] It (the Barbelo Aeon) is endowed with the [26] divine Autogenes like [27] an image, and he knows [28] each one of these, [29] acting separately and [30] individually, continually rectifying [31] the defects from [32] Nature.

Although it is clear that the Self-generated Aeons are located at the periphery of the Barbelo Aeon, it is not clear whether they are to be considered as part of that aeon or as located just outside it. Since *Marsanes* designates the collective of the self-generated ones as a "sixth (seal)" immediately preceding Autogenes as the seventh seal, it appears that these self-generated ones are to be construed as a separate realm immediately subjacent to the Autogenes and therefore subjacent to the Aeon of Barbelo. But in *Zostrianos*, the Self-generated Aeons and their contents form an integral part of the Autogenes subaeon and are thus included within the Barbelo Aeon. Nevertheless, the fact that *Marsanes* claims that Autogenes "extends" (ⲡⲏϩ [ⲁⲭⲛ̄-) to them seems to imply that the author could also count these beings as part of the Autogenes (Aeon)—and thus as part of the Barbelo Aeon—even though he names them as a separate "sixth" level (in which case the numerical scheme of the seals may not exactly coincide with his soteriological doctrine).

In any case, *Marsanes* seems to agree with *Allogenes* in associating both Autogenes and the self-generated ones with the origin of true multiplicity. They have been divided from a "[single one]," which Marsanes experiences as the "many things" that are the object of Autogenes' salvific activity. In the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes* the

self-generated ones are called "perfect individuals"; in *Marsanes* they are called "the incorporeal οὐσία that exists individually" (X 3,20-21) that defines the contents of the sixth seal. Unfortunately in *Allogenes*, the close and somewhat ambiguous relationship between Autogenes and the Triple Male Child creates a further ambiguity concerning Autogenes' relation to the self-generated ones, since it also designates the Triple Male Child as the one who presides over the Self-generated Aeons:

> **XI 55** [35] the [Triple] Male [36] [is a self-generated entity [37] beyond] substance ... **56** [13] The self-generated ones dwell [14] with the [Triple Male.]

B. The Repentance

In *Zostrianos*, the Repentance, where Zostrianos receives six celestial baptisms, consists of six levels of disembodied souls which are distinguished from one another according to whether or not a soul has actually sinned and, if having sinned, how much it sinned and whether or not it repented (VIII 24,30-25,11; 27,21-28,10). These are all morally earnest souls, completely unconcerned with worldly matters. Although they experience (re)incarnation in "dead" bodies and are still liable to sinfulness, especially if they are neophytes, they are "satisfied with knowledge" (γνῶσις), and so earnestly seek after the immortality of their souls and intellect, inquiring not about the moral character of mere deeds, but also of their results (VIII 42,10-19; 43,19-31).

Since *Zostrianos*—unlike the *Apocryphon of John*—does not explicitly assign such repentant souls to the lowest of the Four Luminaries (Eleleth) in the Self-generated Aeons, the author may have developed the Repentance as a specific level below the Self-generated Aeons for precisely this group of souls. Such a move may have been suggested by the novel figure of personified Metanoia ("Repentance") that the author of the *Gospel of the Egyptians* introduces in the place of the more traditional story of Sophia's repentance and restoration into the aeonic world after her "fall." Here, the creation of the lower world is inaugurated by the fourth Luminary Eleleth, who calls for someone to rule over chaos. In response, the "hylic Sophia" cloud emerges and apparently creates the realm of matter, whereupon Gamaliel and Gabriel, servants of the third Luminary Oroiael, provoke the emergence of the demonic pair Saklas and Nebruel, who create the Zodiac and planetary spheres and

populate them with angelic powers. After Saklas boasts in his sole divinity, there follows an interesting account of Sophia's salvation, where the repentant and restored Sophia appears as "Metanoia," apparently a lower but distinct double of the "hylic Sophia" who looked down:

> **III 59** [1] Then a Voice [2] came from on high, saying, [3] "The Man exists, and the Son of the Man." [4] Because of the descent of the image [5] above, which is like its voice in the height [6] of the image which has looked out, [7] through the looking out of the image [8] above, the first creature was [9] formed. Because of this [10] Metanoia came to be. She received her [11] completion and her power by the will [12] of the Father and his approval with which he [13] approved of the great, incorruptible, [14] immovable race of the great, [15] mighty men of the great Seth, [16] in order that he may sow it in the aeons which [17] had been brought forth, so that, through her (Metanoia), [18] the deficiency may be filled up. [19] For she had come forth from above down [20] to the world which is the image of the night. [21] When she had come, she prayed for (the repentance of) both the seed [22] of the archon of this aeon and (the) authorities [23] who had come forth from him, that [24] defiled (seed) of the demon-begetting god [25] which will be destroyed, and the seed **60** [1] of Adam and the great Seth, [2] which is like the sun.

If *Zostrianos* modeled his realm of the Repentance on the distinctive figure of Metanoia in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, he would in effect be reversing a tendency, evident especially in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 39,13-32) and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 56,22-25), to assign Eleleth the blame for the Archon Yaldabaoth's illicit creation of the counterfeit, physical world. In *Zostrianos* (VIII 8,30-11,2), neither Eleleth nor Sophia is blamed for the work of the Archon, and to remove souls even with the slightest taint of sin from the fourth Luminary in the Self-generated Aeons and place them below in the Repentance would constitute an even further exculpation of Eleleth: he has nothing to do with the origin or faultiness of the lower world. Of course, in *Marsanes*, where Sophia is solely associated with salvation, there is not a hint of her responsibility for the origin of the cosmic and material domain, nor for the origin of the creator Archon, who is never mentioned in the extant portions of the treatise; she therefore apparently needs no repentance.

Marsanes identifies the level of the Repentance with the "fifth" seal, above the Sojourn and the worldly and material levels represented by the first three seals:

X 3 [14] The [fifth,] [15] [concerning the] repentance [of] [16] those that are within it and [17] concerning those who sojourn in that place.

It is initially characterized as concerning the "repentance [of] those that are within [it]," i.e., in the fifth seal—the level of the Repentance—and "those who sojourn in that place," which must refer to the immediately preceding and subjacent "[fourth]" seal, a cosmic level that seems equivalent to what *Zostrianos* calls the "Sojourn," as the term "those who sojourn" (ⲛⲉⲧⲟⲩⲛϩ = οἱ παροικῶν) suggests.[4] The fact that the previous passage (X 2,26-3,2) treats the Fourth and Fifth in tandem suggests that these two levels are closely related in *Marsanes*.

The earlier passage (X 2,26-3,14) characterizes this realm and the "Fourth" below it as the incorporeal divine and immortal realms that are located immediately above (literally "after," ⲙⲛ̄ⲛ̄ⲥⲁ, in the ascending sequence of "seals") the corporeal realm of nature "that is divided in three." This division in three might be a reference to the tripartition of the lowest, cosmic and material, domain either into the first three "seals," or perhaps into the three-dimensional nature of that domain (thus restoring the lacuna at the end of X 3,6 by διάστημα, "dimension").

X 2 [26] The fourth (the Sojourn) [27] [and the] fifth (the Repentance) which is above (the Sojourn), [28] [are the ones] you have come to know [29] [as divine]. [30] [The fourth, concerning that which] **3** [1] exists after (i.e., above) the [somatic type] [2] and nature, [3] that is, that which [is divided in] [4] three. And you [were] [5] [informed] about [these and that which is] [6] in three [dimensions] [7] by these [two (the fourth & fifth?)]. [8] You [were informed that it] [9] is incorporeal [10] [...] [11] and after [...] [12] within [...] [13] every [...] which [... and] [14] the things within them.

4. There is a problem with the antecedent referents of the two locative phrases in 3,14-18: ⲧ[ⲙⲁϩⲧⲉ] ⲇⲉ ⲉ[ⲧⲃⲉ ⲧ]ⲙⲉⲧⲁⲛ[ⲟⲓⲁ ⲛ̄] ⲛⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲥ̄ [ⲁ]ⲩⲱ ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲛⲉⲧⲟⲩⲛϩ ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ ("The [fifth, concerning the] repentance [of] those that are in it, and concerning those who sojourn in that place"): while it is natural to restore a feminine singular pronoun in the first phrase (ⲛ̄ϩⲏⲧⲥ̄) as a reflexive reference to "the [fifth]" (whose restoration seems required by "the sixth" in 3,18), the change in verb (from ⲱⲟⲟⲡ to ⲟⲩⲛϩ) and the use of the "far" demonstrative in ⲙ̄ⲡⲙⲁ ⲉⲧⲙ̄ⲙⲉⲩ suggests that "that place" refers, not to the fifth, but to the previously mentioned seal, which would be the fourth. In *Zostrianos*, the equivalent of *Marsanes*' fifth seal is the Repentance, while that of the fourth would be the Sojourn.

All that one can conclude is that the Repentance contains incorporeal, i.e., disembodied, souls who, perhaps during the period between their successive incarnations, have repented of their former life. Since they are on the verge of gaining what *Zostrianos* (VIII 27,14-19; 28,10-16) calls the "self-generated power" characteristic of those in the suprajacent Self-generated Aeons they are in a position to make the correct choice for the kind of life they lead in their final incarnation that will allow them to escape incarnation altogether.

C. The Sojourn

In *Zostrianos*, the Sojourn, where Zostrianos is baptized once as he abandons the perceptible world, seems to represent the initial gathering place for disembodied souls in the process of deciding the character of their next incarnation, perhaps in the realm of the fixed stars (cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 113D-114C; *Phaedrus* 248A-249C). It is in this realm, according to the *Timaeus* (41D-42E), that human souls first began their existence, and whence they were sown into the planets by the creator and acquired from the younger gods their bodies and the lower, irrational parts of their souls. The souls that sojourn there, even though they were originally disembodied with no need of salvation, have now come to live in the perceptible world with "what is dead," that is, in a physical body (VIII 42,10-19). The main characteristic of these souls is that, although they possess an intimation of the truth and shun the wicked practices of others, unlike the souls in the Repentance, few of them have self-generated or self-directed power, and they still have a tendency to follow the ways of others (VIII 24,30-25,5; 27,14-21; 43,13-18).

As can be seen from the passage (X 2,26-34) cited in the immediately previous discussion of the Repentance, *Marsanes* devotes no separate treatment to the nature of the Sojourn as the "Fourth" seal. It is lumped together with the Repentance as a slightly lower level of the incorporeal, divine and immortal realm. As incorporeal and immortal but not cosmic (κοσμικός) or noetic (νοητός), one would suppose that these two constitute the realms of disembodied souls. The "Fourth" is "that place" where those "in" Marsanes (X 3,14-16) perform the act of repentance enabling their transfer to the "Fifth" (the Repentance). In the discussion of "Autogenes—and Sophia?" in Chapter 12, it was noted that the Sojourn is probably the destination and object of Autogenes' salvific extension to "the Fourth" through the instrumentality of Sophia:

> X 3 [25] And the [seventh,] [26] concerning the self-begotten power [27] which [is the] [28] third [perfect Mind], [29] [the second who extended to] 4 [1] [the] Fourth for salvation [2] [through] wisdom.

Autogenes descends to the Sojourn, not in his own person, but through the instrumentality of Sophia. This suggests that wisdom operates on two levels: as the aeonic Sophia, she is instrumental in the transfer of souls from the level of the Sojourn to that of the Repentance, and on the earthly plane, as saving wisdom, she assists the beneficiaries of the missionary activity of Marsanes and his devotees "who are in him" to enter the circle of those devotees by an act of repentance ("change of mind") and likewise come to be "in" Marsanes.

D. The Cosmic Soul in *Marsanes*

It is indeed interesting that apparently none of the Sethian treatises seem to posit a separate hypostasis of Soul as did Plotinus and subsequent Neoplatonists. While the natural realm is populated by ensouled bodies, the realm of disembodied souls is located in the aeons presided over by Autogenes (without further specification of location in *Allogenes* and the *Three Steles of Seth*), perhaps in the Four Luminaries in the *Apocryphon of John*, or in the case of *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*, in the Self-generated Aeons, the Repentance, and the Sojourn. The prominence of the cosmic soul as an independent entity in the doctrine of Plato, Xenocrates, and later in Alcinous, Atticus, Apuleius, and perhaps Moderatus tends to be diminished in many Middle Platonic thinkers, who often merge it with the lower aspect of a divine intellect and sometimes even sunder it into a lower intellect and an opposing principle of irrationality. In the case of the Sethians and Valentinians, it has often been noted that the figure of Sophia frequently bears the distinctive characteristics of the cosmic soul, yet the attributes of instability implied by the soul's basic function as source of all locomotion and change tend to dominate Sophia's characterization, no doubt owing to her causative role in the Gnostic myth of the fall of souls, while the attribute of stability is subsequently conferred on her by a higher masculine intellectual principle as the means of redeeming fallen souls.

Among the Sethian treatises, it is apparently only *Marsanes* that singles out the cosmic soul ("the celestial soul," ⲧ]ⲯⲩⲭⲏ ⲛ̄ⲧⲡⲉ) for separate mention—although in a highly fragmentary context (X 21,20-24: "And [it is a] soul [that has] this [sort of corporeality], namely [the] celestial soul [that sur-]rounds [the world]")—in the course of an argument that "all the forms" (ⲛ̄ⲥⲙⲁⲧ ⲧⲏⲣ[ⲟ]ⲩ) must become "shapes" (σχήματα). It may be that *Marsanes*' portrayal of the cosmic soul as a separate entity is influenced by Iamblichus (and Theodore), who in his *De anima* (*apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.32,61-95 [365,5-366,12 Wachsmuth]) criticized his Middle Platonic predecessors for a failure to distinguish the Soul as a hypostatic entity lower than, distinct from, and dependent on Intellect. Rather than the discursive part or the irrational aspect of Intellect or as the collective of divine and demonic souls, the soul is to be conceived as in Plato's *Timaeus*, a distinct entity mediating between Nature and the intelligible realm.

In *Marsanes*' discussion on the five shapes or configurations of the soul (X 18,14b-39,17), one indeed wonders to what extent these shapes apply to the cosmic soul as opposed to ordinary human souls. In Chapter 14, it will be suggested that the first three "configurations of the soul" may refer to the components of the cosmic soul as portrayed in *Timaeus* 35A-44D, while the fourth and fifth configurations may refer to the condition of individual souls, perhaps in their pre-incarnate state. In turn, the incarnation of these individual souls, represented as various combinations of vowels, is symbolized as the joining of the vowels with the consonants that represent the body, not only human bodies, but also the celestial "bodies" of the stars, the signs of the Zodiac, and so on. The knowledge of these configurations and combinations constitutes a "nomenclature for the gods and angels," affording one a power to "bear fruit" and perhaps acquire an irresistible power: indeed, "the reward that will be provided for such a one is salvation" (X 40,2-4). Other than the "*de anima*" section of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 25,16-27,30) on the destiny of souls, this section of *Marsanes* is the most extensive treatment of the soul in Sethian literature, perhaps even in Gnostic literature as a whole.

E. The Antitypes

While the aeonic realms of the Barbelo Aeon have unqualified true existence, *Zostrianos* introduces a distinction between the Aeonic Copies, the Sojourn, and the Repentance that on the one hand "truly exist," and the Aeonic Copies, the Sojourn, and the Repentance that on the other hand are copies of the former. The same distinction can be seen in the previous quotation from the Bruce Codex (above, p. 559), although

it seems that its author, who enumerates from below to above, mistakenly reverses the precedence of the "true" over the ordinary Aeonic Copies, and identifies the "Copies" both as copies of the atmospheric realm and as copies of the Self-generated Aeons, which are somehow included in the Repentance. In *Zostrianos*, once inferior souls in the physical cosmos have been trained by the Aeonic Copies, they are transferred from the copies (ἀντίτυποι) of these levels to their truly existent realities that constitute the ascent to the truly existent Self-generated Aeons (although Zostrianos himself traverses only the latter, not the former; VIII 5,24-29; 12,7-18; 31,2-12).

The Aeonic Copies, where Zostrianos is baptized seven times in living water, once for each of its aeons, seem to represent the planetary realm extending from the moon to the fixed stars. According to Plato's *Timaeus*, the planets were placed in the circle of the different; similarly, *Zostrianos* maintains that these Copies differ in power (i.e., magnitude, luminosity, period of revolution, etc.) but they all have eternal glory, and they are the seats of the powers that exercise judgment over the lower world. Though luminous, their light is a derived light, yet it is sufficient to serve as a pattern by which souls are enabled to think that they see the truth and the ideal reality that really exists in the unique cause of all things (VIII 11,2-17). Although these souls become incarnate in earthly bodies, and may become satisfied with the derivative light of the Aeonic Copies, their "pattern" remains in the true Aeonic Copies by which they can be "trained," enabling them to be transferred from the mere visible copies of heavenly realities to their truly existent aeonic exemplars (VIII 12,2-22; 24,18-30; 31,2-12).

Finally, it is to be noted that, not only do the Repentance, Sojourn, and the Antitypes figure prominently in *Zostrianos*—and the Repentance and Sojourn likewise in *Marsanes*—but these same terms (μετανοίεις, παροικήσεις, and ἀντίτυποι) figure also in Plotinus' (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6,1-6; cf. II, 1 [40] 4,30-33) critique of the Gnostics' excessive hypostatization of states of the soul.

F. The "Cosmic and Material" Levels of Marsanes' Seals 1-3

As previously noted, *Allogenes* designates all the realms below the Barbelo Aeon as the single realm of "Nature." *Marsanes* lumps together the lowest three realms signified by the first three seals under the category "the worldly and material." It is that part of the sense-perceptible

world that is the corporeal and perceptible (αἰσθητή, X 2,22) as opposed to the three next higher realms (the Sojourn, Repentance, and Self-generated Ones) that are said to be incorporeal (ἀσώματον, X 3,19, cf. 3,9), since they contain incorporeal souls that exist "partially" (κατὰ μέρος, 3,21; for Iamblichus, as parts of the Hypercosmic Soul souls are often termed "partial natures"). The lowest three realms are the habitat of those who are driven by passion and behave sinfully:

> **X 2** [16] The first [17] [and the] second and the [18] [third] (seals) are for the worldly (κοσμικός) [19] and the material (ὑλικός). I have [20] [informed] you concerning these, that you should [21] [guard] your bodies. And [22] a sense-perceptible [power] [23] will [hide] those who will rest, [24] and they will be kept [25] [from] the passion(s) and division [26] [of the] union.

The oxymoron "division (μερισμός) of the union (ⲦⲰⲘⲈ)" most likely refers to the sexual distinction between male and female that arose once the primal (androgynous) human was sundered in two (cf. Gen 1:26-27 with 2:18-25 and Plato, *Symposium* 189D-191D); coupled with the passions, this amounts to preoccupation with the corporeality and materiality inherent in sexual intercourse. The sense-perceptible power that protects the inhabitants of this realm from this danger is quite likely the beings that *Zostrianos* characterizes as "the glories" who enable those destined for eternal rest to be hidden from the agents of such temptations.

In *Zostrianos*, there is a large class of "glories" that inhabit all ontological levels, from the top level of the Barbelo Aeon to the earth itself. Thus Zostrianos' body, left on earth during his ascent, is guarded by glories (VIII 4,23-25); glories likewise guard "those who are worthy" and who have been truly baptized in knowledge, i.e., all Sethians (VIII 24,18-30). Indeed, they are conceptual "patterns of salvation" available as helpers to anyone who wishes to transcend this world (VIII 47,15-31). *Allogenes* also places these glories in the Barbelo Aeon (XI 55,22-24), and likewise conceives the all-glorious (literally "she-of-all-the glories") Youel as Allogenes' chief helper. In both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, it is Youel who, either by anointing Allogenes (XI 52,13-33) or baptizing Zostrianos (VIII 60,24-63,8), prepares the ascending hero for the reception of the final revelation of the highest realities from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon, and instructs him that those matters are to be made available only to those who are worthy. In *Zostrianos*, she appears only on the transcendent level, above the aeon of Auto-

genes, while in *Allogenes*, she apparently descends to earth in order to instruct Allogenes on the nature of the transcendent realities of the Barbelo Aeon and the Triple Powered One.

G. The "Airy Earth"

In *Zostrianos*—but not *Marsanes*—the atmospheric realm, literally the "airy earth," seems to be the realm extending from the earth to the moon, apparently consisting of thirteen aeons, populated by an angelic host (VIII 4,20-5,18). Accounting for its origin and character in terms drawn from Plato's *Timaeus*, the author conceives it as the corruptible realm of becoming, consisting of recalcitrant matter persuaded to be orderly by a rational principle (λόγος). Unfortunately, that rational principle turns out to be only the defective imagination of the Archon of creation, whom the author conceives as a caricature or parody of the Platonic demiurge (VIII 9,2-10,20). This Archon creator cannot see the true transcendent paradigm, but only receives faint images of the transcendent realities and thus relies on his own imagination to simulate an ordered cosmos with its own thirteen simulated aeons.

H. The Material Realm

For Plato, Aristotle, certain dualist Middle Platonists like Plutarch, Atticus, and Numenius, as well as for Valentinian theologians and the authors of the earliest Sethian descent pattern treatises like the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, matter is eternal and ungenerated, a primal but chaotic principle, space, substrate, or stuff existing alongside but opposed to the primal principle of Good and order. But beginning with certain monistic Neopythagoreans and Middle Platonists like Moderatus, matter began to be conceived as a dyadic principle of intrinsic evil somehow generated from but nevertheless opposed to the supreme unitary principle of the Good. So also monistic Neoplatonists after Plotinus conceived matter as secondarily generated, although for them matter was not a principle of evil opposed to the good. Among Platonists, it was Plotinus alone for whom matter was not only an evil in itself—apparently compromising his monism—but was also directly or indirectly generated from the supreme One itself. Among the Sethian treatises, it is the later pattern treatise the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (II 94,4-17) that first offers traces of a secondary generation of matter: it derives from the shadow cast on the lower realms by a veil

(καταπέτασμα) separating them from the upper light, and its generation is associated with Sophia's production of the archon Saklas:

> **II 94** [4] Within limitless realms [5] dwells incorruptibility. Sophia, [6] who is called Pistis, wanted to [7] create something, alone without her consort; and [8] her product was a celestial thing. [9] A veil exists between the upper realm [10] and the aeons below; and [11] a shadow came into being beneath the veil; [12] and that shadow became matter; [13] and that shadow was projected [14] apart. And what she had created became [15] a product in the matter, like an aborted fetus. [16] And it assumed a plastic form molded out of shadow, and became [17] an arrogant beast resembling a lion.

Among the four Platonizing Sethian treatises, which—unlike Plotinus and rather more like the later Neoplatonists—do not conceive matter as an unmitigated evil-in-itself, it is only *Zostrianos* that describes the origin of the matter from which the Archon shapes the corporeal realm, attributing it to the downward inclination of Sophia (VIII 9,1-10,20). This account seems to be included as a way of accounting for the character of the sublunary realm through which Zostrianos must have ascended to arrive at the level of the Aeonic Copies, the Sojourn, Repentance and Self-generated Aeons. It is here that one finds the atmospheric buffer zone that protects the "great judges"—presumably the luminous beings like the stars—from being enclosed in the creation and coming into contact with matter, which was emitted by Sophia when she saw those lights and which she left behind to the governance of the Archon:

> **VIII 9** [1] The [great] pre-eminence [2] Authrounios said [to me]: "The [3] atmospheric realm came into being by a [4] rational principle, and it incorruptibly manifests generated [5] and perishable things [6] for the sake of the advent [7] of the great judges (i.e., stars?), lest they [8] experience perception and [9] be enclosed in the creation. But when [10] they came upon it and thereby perceived [11] the works of the world, [12] they condemned its ruler to a perishability [13] that is a pattern for the world, (and) which [14] is a [substance] and principle of matter, [15] the dark, corrupt [product]. [16]
>
> When Sophia contemplated [17] [these (judges, i.e., stars?)], she emitted the darkness, [18] [fleeing what] is subject to the [19] [Archon, since it] is [an invisible mold (τύπος)], [20] [a principle] of the [insubstantial] substance [21] [and the form]less form [22] [...] a [shapeless] shape. [23] [It makes room] for [24] [every cosmic thing ...] the All [25] [... the corrupt product] [26] [since it is a rational principle] [27] [that persuades] the darkness. [He sows] [28] [from his] reason, since it [is im]possible [29] [for the archon] of [creation] to [30] see any of the eternal entities. **10** [1] He saw a reflection, and with reference to [2] the reflection that he [saw] [3] therein, he created the world. [4] With a reflec-

tion of a reflection [5] he worked upon the world, [6] and then even the reflection of [7] the appearance was taken from him. But [8] Sophia was given a place of rest [9] in exchange for her repentance. [10] In consequence, because there was within her no [11] pure, original image, [12] either pre-existing in him or that had [13] already come to be through him, he [14] used his imagination and fashioned the remainder, [15] for the image belonging to Sophia [16] is always corrupt [and] [17] deceptive. But the Archon [simulates] [18] and embodies by [pursuing the image] [19] because of the superabundance [that inclined downward], looked [20] downward."

Bearing in mind that according to Porphyry (*Vita Plotini* 16), Plotinus had read and critiqued various revelations, *Zostrianos* among them, it is interesting to compare this passage with what seems to be Plotinus' version of it:

> For they say that Soul declined to what was below it, and with it some sort of "Wisdom," (Ψυχὴν γὰρ εἰπόντες νεῦσαι κάτω καὶ σοφίαν τινα) whether Soul started it or whether Wisdom was a cause of Soul being like this, or whether they mean both to be the same thing, and then they tell us that the other souls came down too, and as members of Wisdom put on bodies, human bodies for instance. But again they say that very being for the sake of which these souls came down did not come down itself, did not decline, so to put it, but only illumined the darkness, and so an image from it came into existence in matter. Then they form an image of the image somewhere here below, through matter or materiality or whatever they like to call it (Εἶτα τοῦ εἰδώλου εἴδωλον πλάσαντες ἐνταῦθά που δὶ ὕλης ἢ ὑλότητος ἢ οτι ὀνομάζειν θέλουσι)—they use now one name and now another, and say many other names just to make their meaning obscure—and produce what they call the Maker, and make him revolt from his mother and drag the universe which proceeds from him down to the ultimate limit of images (τὸν λεγόμενον παρ' αὐτοῖς δημιουργὸν γεννῶσι καὶ ἀποστάντα τῆς μητρὸς ποιήσαντες τὸν κόσμον παρ' αὐτοῦ ἕλκουσιν ἐπ' ἔσχατα εἰδώλων). The man who wrote this just meant to be blasphemous! ... Then how did matter when it was illumined make images of the soul kind, instead of bodily nature? An image of soul would have no sort of use for darkness or matter, but when it had come into being, if it did come into being, would correspond to its maker and remain in close connection with it. Then is this image a substance or, as they say, a "thought"? If it is a substance, what is the difference between it and its origin? But if it is another kind of soul, then if that higher soul is the rational soul, presumably this latter is the growth-soul, which is the principle of generation. But if this is what it is, how will their statements still apply that it created for the sake of being honoured, and how does it create out of arrogance and rash self-assertion? In fact, all possibility of a soul of this kind creating through imagination and, still more, through rational activity, is taken away. And why was there still any need to introduce into their system the maker of the universe derived from matter and image? (Καὶ ὅλως τὸ διὰ φαντασίας καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον τὸ λογίζεσθαι ἀνῄρηται. Τί δ' ἔτι ἔδει ἐμποιεῖν ἐξ ὕλης καὶ εἰδώλου τὸν ποιήσαντα;) But if the image is a thought, first of all they must explain whence they derive this name for it; and then how it exists, unless Soul is going to give the thought power to make. But, over and above the fact that this is pure fiction, how does the making work? They say this comes first, and another after that, but they speak quite arbitrarily. And why does fire come first? (Plotinus, *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 10,19-33; 11,14-30 Armstrong)

The underscored material is very similar to the account in *Zostrianos*, while the other material could have come from many sources, including the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and others including Valentinian ones.[5]

Interestingly, Sophia's production of dark matter and the Archon's modeling of the physical cosmos are instances of contemplative making, as we see it in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and perhaps in Amelius. The only catch is that both Sophia's and the Archon's contemplative gaze is directed downwards, instead of above to an eternal paradigm. While *Zostrianos* does not portray the Archon as the offspring of Sophia, it is worth noting that even in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 9,25-10,5) where Sophia gives rise to the Archon, she is said to produce a thought from herself and from the conception (ἐνθύμησις) of the supreme Invisible Spirit, which, without the aid of her consort, results in the alien-formed Archon—an act which, however audacious and blameworthy, involves at least a small component of contemplation. Later in the same text (II 12,25-13,5), the Archon creates the physical cosmos in imitation of the ideal aeons, although this act is due, not to his contemplation of those aeons, but rather to the power he had stolen from his mother Sophia. Again, the Archon explicitly molds the psychic Adam according

5. On "the other souls [that] came down too," see VIII 27,9-14; the primal fire that puzzles Plotinus occurs towards the end of *Zostrianos* in a description of the light that surrounds the contents of the Kalyptos Aeon (VIII 116,16b-24a; 117,10-11). Its essence is incorporeal and immutable but nevertheless has an element of change, an "[unconsuming and indestructible] fire" (see VIII 48,6 and Plato, *Timaeus* 58C5-7 for a kind of fire, "issuing from flame, but which does not burn [ὃ κάει μὲν οὔ], but supplies light to the eyes"). The notion of the unconsuming fire as the divine splendor is found also in Jewish mystical comment (e.g., the Zohar) on Dt 4:24 ("For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire"); it is the white light issuing most directly from the divine source that shone upon Moses on Sinai.

to the downward projected image of the First Perfect Man. After this event, Sophia repents of her audacious and self-willed act, and is restored to a position in the ninth heaven, whereupon she becomes a guarantor of salvation.

Aside from a general association between "the cosmic and the material" (X 2,16b-19a; cf. 18,21-22), *Marsanes* never refers to the creator of the physical world and devotes no attention to either the origin or nature of matter, nor to any specific relationship between Sophia and the creation of the lower cosmos. Her sole function is salvific, namely the salvation of the souls inhabiting the "Fourth," the realm immediately *above* the cosmic and material. *Marsanes* holds that the sense-perceptible world "is [worthy] of being preserved entire" (X 5,22b-26a) but the actual extent of that realm is not made entirely clear: does this designation apply only to the lowest three "seals" (the cosmic and material realm) or does it refer to that realm as well as the fourth and fifth "seals" (the Sojourn and Repentance)? The fact that the figure of Autogenes (who extends to the self-generated ones) is immediately invoked in connection with the preservation of the sense-perceptible world in X 5,27-6,1 "[lest anyone] be [ignorant] in turn (κατὰ μέρος) of the entire place" fails to clarify the issue of the preservation of the lower realm, since "the entire place" could designate merely the aeonic world, or again, that world plus the psychic realm of the Sojourn and Repentance, or, less likely, even those two realms as well as the cosmic and material realm.[6] Perhaps one may conclude that Autogenes does in fact see to the preservation of all these realms acting through various unnamed intermediaries, just as Sophia assists him in the salvation of those in the Sojourn and Repentance; this solution tends to receive support from the parallel in *Allogenes* XI 51,25-32 which has Autogenes "continually rectifying the defects from Nature." The manner in which he does this, however, remains a mystery.

The positive attitude toward the preservation or improvement of the sensible cosmos in the Platonizing Sethian treatises seems to be rather exceptional for the Sethian tradition:

6. This elusive term, "the entire place" (ⲡⲙⲁ ⲧⲏⲣⲟ̄ⲩ [τὸ πᾶν] X 4,29; 6,1.23; 10,2-3; 29,5; 33,3; 38,21) seems in each case (except 29,5) to designate the noncorporeal, invisible realm; it seems almost equivalent to the Valentinian term πλήρωμα.

VIII 10 [28] And [again he (Ephesech) said, "Sophia became] [29] perfect through [the will of] [30] [the commander (Autogenes?)] through whom [the atmospheric] [31] [realm perseveres], having **11** [1] [immutably averted] the destruction of the world."

XI 51 [25] It (the Barbelo Aeon) is endowed with the [26] divine Autogenes like [27] an image, and he knows [28] each one of these, [29] acting separately and [30] individually, continually rectifying [31] the defects from [32] Nature.

X 5 [21] And [22] the intelligible world knew [23] by discrimination [24] that in every respect the sense-perceptible [25] world is [worthy] [26] of being preserved entire, [for] [27] I have not ceased speaking [of the] [28] Autogenes, [lest] [29] [anyone] be [ignorant] **6** [1] in turn of the entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm).

In each case, the one responsible for the preservation or rectification of the natural realm seems to be Autogenes, exercising his demiurgical role, apparently through some instrumentality such as Sophia or even through the individual souls that have descended into the world for its purification, a view very close to that advocated by the Platonist commentator on the *Timaeus*, Calvisius Taurus, cited with approval by Iamblichus in his *De anima* (*apud* Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.39,44-53 [1.378,25-379,2 Wachsmuth]): "the souls are sent into the world ... for the perfection of the All (εἰς τελείωσιν τοῦ πάντος) ... for this is the will of the gods, to make the gods manifest through [human] souls; for the gods become visible and show themselves through the pure and uncontaminated life of [human] souls."[7] This view is based on *Timaeus* 41A-42A (esp. 41B) in reference to the demiurgic activity of the lesser gods in fashioning the mortal beings, a view quite in keeping with the general position of the Platonizing Sethian treatises vis-à-vis the salvific descents of Barbelo and her avatars in the earlier Sethian "descent pattern" treatises: transcendent gods do not descend, but souls do.

II. The Hierarchies of the Platonizing Treatises Compared

The Sethian Platonizing texts do not exhibit a single system, but vary in their interpretation of a rather fixed set of Sethian theologumena, the Triple Powered One, the Aeon of Barbelo and its contents, and in the

7. Cf. the *Apocryphon of John* II 27,17-21: "That soul [18] is caused to follow another in whom is the Spirit of [19] life, by which (the other soul) [20] is saved. Thus, it is not [21] cast into flesh again."

depiction of the incorporeal and corporeal realms below. The Triple Powered One is a functional triad within either the Barbelo Aeon or the Invisible Spirit (in the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Zostrianos*), but can tend to appear almost as a distinct entity mediating between the Invisible Spirit and the Aeon of Barbelo (in *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*). Although the basic ontology of the Barbelo Aeon is tripartite, it may contain three (the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes*) or, with the addition of the Triple Male, four entities (as in *Allogenes* and parts of *Zostrianos*); this anomaly owes to the rather complex history of the specific epithets ascribed to Barbelo in previous Sethian tradition. In *Marsanes*, not only is the Existence-Vitality-Mentality / Blessedness or Being-Mind-Life triad absent, but so also is the ontological triad of the authentic existents, the unified ones, and the perfect individuals; only the last-named term appears as "the incorporeal that exists individually" (X 3,20-21). Although *Marsanes* lists three levels beneath the Barbelo Aeon named Kalyptos (called "[head] of the First Appearing One"), Protophanes, and Autogenes, these levels are not said to be contained in the Barbelo Aeon, nor do they undergo the gradual unfolding depicted in *Allogenes*; the only unfolding depicted in the text is that of the Invisible Spirit via the Triple Powered One into the Aeon of Barbelo. The most striking innovation in *Marsanes* remains the positing of the Unknown Silent One beyond the Invisible Spirit, which seems as though it is inspired by the metaphysics of Iamblichus or Theodore of Asine discussed in Chapter 10, yet departs from Iamblichus' clear and Theodore's implied insistence on the absolute aloofness of this supreme principle by conceiving the initial phase (the Invisible Spirit) of the Triple Powered One as somehow manifested by the Silence of the Silent One as its actualization (X 7,24-29). And certainly there is nothing as sophisticated as Iamblichus' scheme of interlinked unparticipated, participated, and participating hypostatic levels or Theodore's levels of wholes (before-the-parts, of-the-parts, and in-the-parts). *Marsanes* is certainly not a conscious implementation of later Neoplatonic systems, whether of Iamblichus or of Theodore, but is plausibly under their influence.

A. The System of the *Three Steles of Seth*

The *Three Steles of Seth* exhibits the following divine hierarchy:

Major Ontological Levels	Subordinate Powers/Contents
The truly pre-existent One beyond being / Living Spirit (triple-Powered)	Pre-existence Pre-vitality Pre-blessedness
The Barbelo Aeon/ Monad / Triple Male / Triple Power (threefold Monad, generator of multiplicity [One-Many])	Substantiality / Existence Vitality / Life Mentality / Mind
Kalyptos / Thought Protophanes / Mind Autogenes / Logos	All-perfect ones? The Unified? The Perfect Individuals
Heavenly ἀλλογενὴς Pigeradamas, father of Emmacha Seth	Goodness Sower / Begetter
Seed of Seth in the world (perfect individuals)	

The *Three Steles of Seth* specifically exhibits two main transcendent levels in addition to the sensible cosmos, that of the truly pre-existent One or truly living Spirit (clearly the same as the supreme Invisible Spirit in most Sethian treatises) altogether beyond determinate being, and that of its product that has become "numerable" in a "threefold" way, the Aeon of Barbelo. Although there is no mention of a distinct being such as the Triple Powered One, Barbelo is clearly said to have originated in "triple-powered" fashion (VII 120,19-22), and is explicitly called a "threefold power ... from an undivided Triple Powered One" (VII 121,29-33; 123,23-24), implying that in the *Three Steles of Seth*, the Triple Powered One does not appear as a distinct entity, but is in fact Barbelo's prefigurative self before, during, and after her emergence from her source, the pre-existent Spirit.

As one might expect in a set of doxological hymns to be employed in a communal praxis of visionary ascent, the process of the Barbelo Aeon's emanation from the One is not specifically narrated, although it is clearly called a monadic shadow from the One that has become triple (VII 122,1-12), making available to all Substantiality, Vitality and Mentality, as well as Being, Life and Mind (VII 122,19-34; 123,18-26) Although the names Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes occur in this treatise, Autogenes is not specifically treated as a member of the Aeon of Barbelo, who forms the central object of praise in the second of the three steles, but is the object of praise in the first stele in his capacity as the Mirotheos, immediate parent of Seth's Mirotheid father Pigeradamas. On the other hand, Protophanes and Kalyptos are specifically

mentioned as contained in the Aeon of Barbelo: "And you (Barbelo) become a great male Mind, Protophanes" (VII 123,4-5), and "You are a Kalyptos; you are a universe of understanding" (VII 122,14-15). Ontological realms below that of the Aeon of Barbelo are not specifically denominated, although Seth's parent Pigeradamas is clearly a heavenly being, and it appears that so also is Seth himself, while his seed, for whom Dositheus recites the three steles inscribed by Seth, presumably still inhabit the sensible cosmos.

B. The System of *Zostrianos*

The divine hierarchy of *Zostrianos* is similar to the *Three Steles of Seth*, but much more prolix, with its numerous catalogues of the contents of the various aeonic levels. *Zostrianos* clearly articulates the divine hierarchy of the Invisible Spirit, the Aeon of Barbelo—including its clearly delineated triad of subaeons Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes together with all their contents—and the various realms of the perceptible cosmos below the intelligible level of the Barbelo Aeon (the Repentance, Sojourn, Aeonic Copies, Airy Earth, and the earthly realm). One notes in particular the absence of any tendency to distinguish the Triple Powered One from the Invisible Spirit, since in *Zostrianos* this term is merely an epithet of the Invisible Spirit himself. These three powers represent not only the powers of the single supreme principle, the Invisible Spirit, but are also identical with the prefigurative presence of the Aeon of Barbelo existing potentially within the Invisible Spirit that takes on determinate existence only at the termination of a threefold emanative process. The three phases of this emanation, named mostly in the non-Iamblichean order Existence, Blessedness (i.e., Mind), and Life, but also in the Iamblichean order Existence, Life, and Blessedness, are then actualized within the Aeon of Barbelo as the triad of Kalyptos (Existence), Protophanes (Blessedness), and Autogenes (Life). Finally, the Barbelo Aeon also contains a fourth figure, the Triple Male Child, whose position therein is rather ambiguous, hovering in the realm between Protophanes and Autogenes as a sort of traveling mediator between them, but without defining a separate ontological level of his own.

Zostrianos exhibits the following divine hierarchy (for clarity's sake, the Barbelo Aeon and its complex contents are surrounded by a double border):

Invisible Spirit ↓ (with 3 Powers)	1. Existence ↓ 2. Vitality ↓	(Luminaries)	(Revealers)
The Barbelo Aeon	3. Mentality		Armê Semen Salamex
Kalyptos the authentic existents	Harmedon (Doxomedon Aeon?) Second Aeon Third Aeon Fourth Aeon	Aphredon, Armê (?) Diphaneus, Deiphanea Marsedon? Solmis, Olmis	Youel
Protophanes those that are unified	Armedon (?) Aeon Akremon Aeon Ambrosius Aeon Hymneos (?) Aeon	Selmen, Theophaneus Zachthos, Yachthos Setheus, Antiphantes Seldao, Elenos	
(Triple Male Child)			
Autogenes Self-generated Aeons the perfect individuals	Autogenes + Meirothea ↓ Pigeradamas + Prophania ↓ → Emmacha Seth + Plesithea ↓ The Seed of Seth Sophia Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus Micheus, Michar, Barpharanges, Seldao, Elenos, Zogenethlos	Harmozel ("the Oroiael Four Davithe Luminaries") Eleleth = (Child of the Child) =	Ephesech Authrounios Other glories
The Repentance	(= self-generated immortal souls)	(six aeons)	
The Sojourn	(= non-self-generated souls)	(one aeon)	
The Aeonic Copies	(= disembodied mortal souls)	(seven aeons?)	
The "Airy Earth"	(= the sublunar atmosphere)		
The World (Earth)	(= the Archons' creation)	(13 aeons)	

C. The System of *Allogenes*

The divine hierarchy of *Allogenes* can be represented as follows:

Invisible Spirit/ Unknowable One	Exists	Lives	Knows
The Triple Powered One/ Eternal Life	Existence	Vitality	Mentality
The Aeon of Barbelo/ First Thought	Being	Life	Knowledge
Kalyptos (τὰ ὄντως ὄντα) (praised κατά)	(Existence)		
Protophanes (οἱ ἐνούμενοι) (praised κατά)		Vitality	
Triple Male Child			
Autogenes (τὰ καθ' ἕνα) (praised κατά)			Mentality
The realm of Nature			

Allogenes articulates the levels of the ontological hierarchy to an even greater degree, to the extent that the prefigurative phase of the Barbelo Aeon tends to appear as a distinct quasi-hypostasis, the Triple Powered One, occupying its own level between the supreme Invisible Spirit and the Barbelo Aeon, and wholly containing Barbelo's three emanative phases as its own distinctive powers, Existence, Vitality, and Mentality, which are now conceived as a median phase between the purely infinitival existing, living and knowing of the Invisible Spirit and the substantive and determinate Being, Life and Knowledge that characterize the actualized reality of the Barbelo Aeon. The three ontological levels of this Aeon are further defined as "the authentic existents," "those that are unified," and "the perfect individuals," said to be contained or presided over by Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes. Like *Zostrianos*, in *Allogenes* the Barbelo Aeon also contains a fourth figure, the Triple Male Child, hovering in the realm between Protophanes and Autogenes as a sort of traveling mediator between them, but without defining a separate ontological level of his own. Unlike *Zostrianos* and rather closer to the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Allogenes* makes no mention of any specific levels of being below the Barbelo Aeon, apparently lumping them together as the realm of "Nature," whose defects are continually rectified by Autogenes.

D. The System of *Marsanes*

Because of the clear enumeration of its ontological levels in terms of the thirteen "Seals," the divine hierarchy of *Marsanes* can be articulated as follows:

Seal 13	First Principles	The Unknown Silent One	
Seal 12	(insubstantial)	The Invisible Spirit	Hypostasis or first power?
Seal 11		The Triple Powered One	Energeia or second power?
Seal 10	Intelligible Realm	The Barbelo Aeon	Gnosis or third power?
Seal 9	(substantial)	(Kalyptos)	
Seal 8		Protophanes (Mind)	
Seal 7		Autogenes	
Seal 6	Psychic Realm	The Self-generated Aeons (incorporeal – individuals?)	
Seal 5	(partial,	The Repentance (incorporeal – repentant souls)	
Seal 4	incorporeal)	The Sojourn (incorporeal – disembodied souls)	
Seal 3	Nature	The Third (non-corporeal – sensible – planetary spheres?)	
Seal 2	(perceptible,	The Second (corporeal – sublunar realm?)	
Seal 1	corporeal)	The First (corporeal - physical, material realm?)	

Marsanes enumerates the metaphysical hierarchy from bottom-up rather than top-down. The first three levels or "seals," the "cosmic and material," designate the perceptible realm of nature, and the next three levels comprise the incorporeal realm of souls considered as "partial" natures that constitute the object of the divine Autogenes' salvific activity. Levels seven through ten comprise the realm of pure intelligible substance, although *Marsanes* merely lists its contents as a series consisting of Autogenes, (Protophanes), (Kalyptos), and the Barbelo Aeon, without supplying the proper names of Protophanes or Kalyptos and without specifying that these two in concert with Autogenes form a set of subaeons within the Barbelo Aeon; of these, it is only Autogenes and the Barbelo Aeon as a single entity that receive any special attention in *Marsanes*. The three highest levels represent the realm of first principles, and here too, as in the case of the author's failure to supply the precise names of Kalyptos and Protophanes as sublevels of the Barbelo Aeon, the author identifies these supreme principles—from lowest to highest—with a similarly imprecise nomenclature: "the Invisible One who possesses three powers," "the insubstantial Spirit who belongs to the first unbegotten one." and "the Silent One who was not [known]." Here, the two terms of the proper name "Invisible Spirit" have been distributed among the designations of two distinguishable beings, the "one with the three powers"—the Triple Powered One—and the "insubstantial Spirit"—obviously the Invisible Spirit—perhaps in an effort to draw these two entities into the closest possible relationship, apparently as the "two powers" from which the Barbelo Aeon withdraws upon its instantiation (X 9,9-16) as an independent being, the Knowledge of the Invisible Spirit (X 9,3-5). On the other hand, the entirely separate status of the Unknown Silent One as the thirteenth seal is clearly marked.

E. Comparison of the Sethian Hierarchies

In comparison to the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes*, it appears that the author of *Marsanes* has made a number of modifications. Working from the top down, the first obvious change is the addition of the Unknown Silent One at the very apex of the divine hierarchy. Next, *Marsanes* agrees with *Allogenes* against the other two texts by dividing the next highest being into two separate "seals": an invisible three-powered One and an insubstantial Spirit; *Allogenes* distinguishes this pair as the Invisible Spirit and the Triple Powered

One. The equivalent of the Triple Powered One in the *Three Steles of Seth* is ultimately identified both with Barbelo's prefigurative presence within the supreme pre-existent One and with her instantiation as the independently existing Aeon of Barbelo, while in *Zostrianos*, the Triple Powered One is identified with its source, "the Invisible Triple-Powered Spirit." *Marsanes* also makes no use of the Existence-Vitality-Mentality or Being-Life-Mind triad as designations for the powers of the Triple Powered One, but may supply its own designations for these in the somewhat similar triad ὑπόστασις, ἐνέργεια, and γνῶσις (X 9,15-20).

If anything, the doctrine of the Triple Powered One seems to be an attempt to reintroduce into a monistic, strictly hierarchical metaphysics a feature of the old two-opposed-principles doctrine of Plato's later years, since the central or median power of the Triple Powered One—namely Vitality or Life—seems to function much as do Plato's principle of the indefinite dyad or unlimited that is opposed to the One or limit. But just as in various Neopythagorean testimonia, the dyad is now derived from the monadic principle above it, and just as in Plotinus, this processing dyad—which he early on called "intelligible matter" and later identified as a trace of "life" from the One—is conceived as an indefinite Vitality or Activity that becomes the determinate being of Intellect when it reverts back on its source (the One) in a moment of vision.

The treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* differ significantly from Plotinus, since traditional Sethian mythology may have encouraged them to serialize and hypostatize things that Plotinus—and Porphyry too, for that matter—refused to hypostatize: thus all three explicitly tripartition the divine Intellect, the Barbelo Aeon, into three subaeons; *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* virtually hypostatize the independent figure of the Triple Powered One; and *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* further partition the realms below intellect into various aeonic levels containing various kinds of souls. Were one to name the first non-Sethian Platonists to propose similar innovations, they would likely be Iamblichus and his (and Porphyry's) pupil, Theodore of Asine.

Like the *Three Steles of Seth* but unlike *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, *Marsanes* does not emphasize that the figures of Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes constitute distinct sublevels of the Barbelo Aeon, even though it enumerates these figures as separate seals. Again, like the *Three Steles of Seth*, but unlike *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, *Marsanes* does not clearly articulate the presence of the Triple Male Child as a

distinctive figure active in the Barbelo Aeon; indeed, while the *Three Steles of Seth* merely attests the status of the phrase "Triple Male" as a traditional Sethian epithet of Barbelo, *Marsanes* makes no mention of this name at all. With regard to the ontological content of the Barbelo Aeon—which *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* understand to consist of the three levels 1) the "authentic existents" in Kalyptos, 2) those that are "unified" in Protophanes, 3) and the "perfect individuals" in Autogenes—*Marsanes* merely identifies the self-generated ones of the sixth seal—equivalent to the Self-generated Aeons immediately below the level of Autogenes—as "the incorporeal being (οὐσία) that exists individually," thus agreeing with the *Three Steles of Seth* in placing these beings outside the Barbelo Aeon.

Finally, only *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* agree in the enumeration of ontological levels extending below the Barbelo Aeon into the realm of Nature, sharing the same designations for the three highest of these (the Self-generated Aeons, the Repentance, and the Sojourn), although *Marsanes* lacks the level of the Aeonic Copies (ἀντίτυποι).

Of all these similarities and differences, the most striking seem to be *Marsanes*' doctrine of a supreme Unknown Silent One that transcends even the Invisible Spirit, and of the Triple Powered One as a quasi-independent entity mediating between the Invisible Spirit and the Aeon of Barbelo, a doctrine it also shares—although with a different nomenclature for its powers—with *Allogenes*. There is no precedent in the Platonism of Plotinus and his predecessors for this new supreme entity, nor does the anomalous quasi-independent status of the Triple Powered One in *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* seem to have any immediate analogy in Platonic metaphysics prior to Iamblichus.

The following chart is an attempt to compare the metaphysical hierarchies of Iamblichus and Theodore of Asine presented in Chapter 12 to that of the Platonizing Sethian treatises. *Marsanes* and *Zostrianos* rather than the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Allogenes* are here chosen for comparison, since they specify ontological levels below that of the Barbelo Aeon:

Iamblichus	Marsanes and Zostrianos	Theodore
Absolutely Ineffable	**Unknown Silent One** (*Marsanes*)	**Ineffable First One**
The Simply One	**Invisible Spirit**	**Second One**
Limit	**Triple Powered One** (*Marsanes*)	**Intellectual Depth** existing
Unlimited		living
One-Being (as μικτόν)		thinking
One-Being (as Being)	**Aeon of Barbelo**	**Demiurgical Depth**
Intelligible Mind	**Kalyptos**	being
Intellectual Mind	**Protophanes Mind**	mind
Hypercosmic Soul	**Autogenes** + Self-generated Aeons	life = ↓
Encosmic Soul	**Self-generated Aeons** (*Marsanes*)	**Absolute Soul** – whole-before-parts
		Universal Soul – whole-of-parts
Souls-in-participation	**Repentance** – Sophia?	**All-Soul** – whole-in-parts
Divine souls	**Sojourn** (disembodied souls)	Ouranos, Gaia
Daemonic souls	**"The Third"** – **Aeonic Copies**	Oceanus, Tethys, Phorkys
Heroic souls	**"The Second"** – **Airy Earth**	Kronos, Rhea
Human-animal souls	**"The First"** – **the World**	Zeus
Nature-matter	**"The First"** the realm of Matter	Hera

In comparison to *Zostrianos*, *Marsanes*, and even Iamblichus, Theodore's metaphysical hierarchy, at least as much of it as can be gleaned from Proclus' rather fragmentary summaries, was much more complex. Both he and Iamblichus—both of whom wrote commentaries on the *Timaeus*—adhere rather more closely than do the Platonizing Sethian treatises to the interpretation of specific texts of Plato. Nevertheless, both Iamblichus and Theodore share many points of similarity with the metaphysical hierarchy underlying all four Platonizing Sethian treatises, especially that of *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes*.

The resemblances between *Marsanes* and Theodore are especially striking. There is first an ineffable transcendent One occupying the place of *Marsanes*' Unknown Silent One. Next there is a triadic "second One" representing the *spiritus asper* of the supreme One (*Hen*), which suggests some kind of spirit, something somewhat similar to the Invisible Spirit occupying *Marsanes*' second level, although *Marsanes* apparently maintains that this spirit "does not have breath" (X 15,1-4; 15,29-16,2; cf. Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* I.50,5-8: "(the One is) Spirit beyond Spirit, for he does not breathe, but rather it is the Spirit in that which is his being, Spirit breathing towards itself so that it is Spirit, since the Spirit is not separate from itself"). At the third level, there is the Intellectual Depth consisting of the three activities of Existing, Thinking, and Living and at the fourth the Demiurgical Depth, characterized as a triad

of Being, Mind, and Life. Although this triadic nomenclature is wanting in *Marsanes*, it does rather remind one of *Allogenes*' enneadic speculation on the Existing, Living, and Thinking of the Invisible Spirit, its triad of abstract powers Existence, Vitality and Mentality comprising the Triple Powered One, and its substantive triad of Being, Life and Mind associated with the three levels of the Barbelo Aeon, doctrines also reflected to a certain extent in *Zostrianos*. Thus one might compare Theodore's Intellectual Depth and Demiurgical Depth to the Sethian Platonizing figures of the Triple Powered One and the Aeon of Barbelo respectively.

Noteworthy among the Platonizing Sethian treatises is the lack of a transcendent, psychic realm specifically occupied by the cosmic soul, a realm that is carefully articulated into three levels by both Iamblichus and Theodore. This omission is especially noticeable in *Marsanes*' failure to devote a specific numbered "seal" to the cosmic soul, despite the author's acknowledgment of its presence in X 21,20-24 ("[the] celestial soul [*that sur*]*rounds* [*the world*]") and his lengthy description of its two main configurations in X 25,21-26,17. This omission is probably to be explained by the author's adherence to the traditional hierarchy found in the other Platonizing Sethian treatises that do not include the cosmic soul among the main transcendentalia. If anything, the demiurgical and salvific activities of Autogenes tend to substitute for the ordering function of the rational component of the cosmic soul. In general, the Platonizing Sethian treatises seem to have partially collapsed what would count as a psychic realm together with the intellectual realm of the Barbelo Aeon, since it appears that for *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, the lowest two levels of the Barbelo Aeon, namely Protophanes and Autogenes, contain—among other ideal entities—certain superior souls (those that are "unified" as well as the "(perfect) individuals," i.e., those having a certain "wholeness" of the parts and in the parts), while the highest level of Kalyptos contains the authentic existents (τὰ ὄντως ὄντα), which seem rather like Iamblichus' "participated" encosmic soul and Theodore's absolute soul (as a "whole before the parts"). On the other hand, like Iamblichus and Theodore, both *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* go on to articulate the lower psychic realms of the Self-generated Aeons or "Self-generated Ones," the Repentance, and the Sojourn, which seem to be gathering places for those souls still in the process of transmigration. Below these levels, there are still the souls that inhabit "bodies" in the

domains of the stars, planets, and those that inhabit physical bodies in the "cosmic and material" realms. Nevertheless, these are souls that are definitely "in relation" (Theodore's term) to the souls in the higher realms, since they are guarded by "glories" (*Zostrianos*, esp. VIII 46,15-31) or by a "sense-perceptible power" (*Marsanes* X 2,22-26).

The correspondences between ontological levels in *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* on the one hand, and Theodore—and to a lesser extent in Iamblichus—are not exact and exhibit clear terminological differences. But of these two, *Zostrianos* seems much the earlier, having gained the attention of Plotinus and the members of his circle, while *Marsanes*' complex alphabetic and numeric speculation on the nature of the soul and the nomenclature of the gods is much closer in spirit to what we know of Theodore. There are enough structural resemblances to consider *Marsanes* as a product of the same conceptual climate in which Theodore and even Iamblichus constructed their metaphysics, the main difference being that *Marsanes* was expounding Sethian tradition while Iamblichus and Theodore were expounding the works of Plato. *Marsanes*' resemblance to these two Platonists is close enough to conclude that its author was certainly no direct pupil of either, but nevertheless may well have possessed a general impression of their doctrines by way of popular discussion and the study of various sources, including not only other Platonizing Sethian treatises and various metaphysical treatises, but grammatical and astrological treatises as well. Certainly the author of *Marsanes* makes it clear that, not only has he experienced personal revelations and visions of the powers he describes, but had also engaged in a good deal of study and reflection upon them as well.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SETHIAN DOCTRINES OF THE SOUL

Following A.-J. Festugière's analysis of the largely Platonizing literature on the soul during the early patristic period, G. MacRae once noted the following points of agreement between Platonists and Gnostics:[1]

1. The soul, both cosmic and individual, has a heavenly origin from which it has descended and to which it will return.
2. Its salvation depends on knowledge of this fact.
3. It must choose between the way of life or of death.
4. The soul must awake from a condition of forgetfulness, sleep or drunkenness in which the divine intelligence or logos functions as awakener.
5. The world and its ways are by nature evil because material.
6. The conduct which the soul must pursue is ascetical.

While all Gnostic thinkers are agreed that the presence of the soul in the body is a misfortune from which it must be extricated, some attribute its enforced presence in the body to a specific cause antecedent to the creation of individual human souls, while others do not. Those who propose a specific cause usually do so by means of elaborate myths that combine a theogony of the divine world and a cosmogony with an anthropogony based on the initial chapters of the book of Genesis. In these myths, the creation of this world is attributed to a fall from the perfection of the higher world at some point subsequent to its initial production. In general, it is a cosmic soul or some equivalent being to whom this failure is attributed.

I. Sophia and the Cosmic Soul

Gnostic literature featuring the grand myths of origin typical of Valentinianism and Sethianism devotes far less attention to the description of

1. G. MacRae, "Nag Hammadi and the New Testament" in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 144-157; A.-J. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*. Vol. II. *Le Dieu Cosmique* (Études bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1949), 97-118.

the soul's incarnate experience that it does to the explanation of its original cause. This cause is to be found in the transcendent world soul, subordinate to the divine Mind whose direct knowledge of the supreme deity it attempts to reproduce, but with disastrous consequences. The quintessential personification of this psychic principle is Sophia, the divine wisdom, who becomes guilty of a transgression in seeking an independent direct knowledge and imitation of the creative power of the supreme deity. This attempt leads to the creation of the material world, and ultimately to the imprisonment of human souls within it as lost fragments of the originally divine substance. Indeed, Plotinus clearly recognized the equivalence between the world soul and the figure of Sophia in the gnostic treatises he read:

> For they say that Soul declined to what was below it, and with it some sort of "Wisdom," (Ψυχὴν γὰρ εἰπόντες νεῦσαι κάτω καὶ σοφίαν τινα) whether Soul started it or whether Wisdom was a cause of Soul being like this, or whether they mean both to be the same thing, and then they tell us that the other souls came down too, and as members of Wisdom put on bodies, human bodies for instance. (Plotinus, *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 10,19-24 Armstrong)

As MacRae and others have argued, the Jewish figure of Wisdom has decisively influenced the Gnostic myths of Sophia, Barbelo/Pronoia, and Epinoia/Zôê, as shown by the parallels in the Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom books of Proverbs, Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, and 1 Enoch 42. These figures are projections of Sophia herself, the consort and agent of the Father in creation, revelation and redemption. In the wisdom books, Sophia's role is much more that of co-creator and inspirer than redeemer, and she certainly does not "fall." In the basic Sethian and Valentinian myths, Sophia seems to be the paradigm of human experience, responsible for our present plight by having fallen into disorder and passion and thence giving birth to matter as well as a world creator who fabricates both a physical cosmos and human bodies as containers for the divine substance he robs from his mother. But then, herself awakened by a divine "call," she repents and is restored, and can even begin to act in this world for the restoration of this divine substance to its true home.

In the course of time, a single figure could not simultaneously be cause of both deficiency and restoration. The vicissitudes in the career of Sophia that symbolize the paradigmatic instance of the human experience of falleness, awakening, and final salvific restoration, have become too ambiguous and ambivalent to continue to apply to a single figure. Thus the figure of Sophia is split up into several figures, each one of whom symbolizes only a single facet in her once multifarious but continuous career.

Thus in the *Apocryphon of John*, there are two "mothers," Barbelo and Sophia. The higher Mother Barbelo who conceives the Autogenes Son from a spark of the Father's light is calm and stable, while the lower mother Sophia, who conceives the formless Archigenetor Yaldabaoth in the absence of a male form-contributing partner, enters into agitation and disordered movement. Such agitation is a notable characteristic of Plato's Receptacle and Nurse of becoming, caused by a disequilibrium of certain unbalanced powers (hot, cold, moist, dry) and passions that enter into it. Since motion can only be caused by soul, it thus appears that the disorderly receptacle could be regarded as a lower irrational soul, which indeed Sophia appears to be. As the source of such disorder and evil, Sophia is, like Plutarch's Isis, a feminine principle eager for offspring, but unfortunately unmastered by the masculine principle of order. Such a division of the Mother figure into two levels reminds one of the instances noted previously in Chapter 9 of a bipartitioning of the cosmic soul or logos into a higher, stable and intelligible level and a lower level in motion, as in the case of Plutarch's Isis, who as the material principle is the honored consort of God, and as mother of Horus is also the irrational aspect of the cosmic soul. Such also seems to be true of the Valentinian Sophia and Achamoth, and of the Chaldaean figure of Hecate, who seem to function at two levels in their respective theologies, first as the processing power of the paternal Monad (the "center" between the Paternal Monad and the divine Intellect), and at a lower level, as the World Soul (or at least as its source, from whose "right side abundantly flows the ineffable liquid" of the primordial soul).

In the *Apocryphon of John*, the actual incarnation of souls is spelled out in terms of the attempt of Yaldabaoth and his archontic assistants to trap the image of the divine first human being, Adamas, in the material body of Adam, in which act they produce a "psychic human being." The details of this process are taken both from Plato's *Timaeus* (73E-77D), which describes the shaping of the mortal soul as a kind of "marrow"

enclosed in bone, sinew, flesh, blood, skin and hair,[2] and from Gen 2-4, regarded as describing the capture of the divine image in a body that remains inert until the archon unwittingly inspires it with the divine breath stolen from his mother Sophia. The excerpt from "the Book of Zoroaster" in the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 15,29-19,10), which relates the contributions of the 365 angels to the psychic and material body of Adam, surely has to do with certain astrological doctrines concerning the powers of the 36 decans and their subdivisions characteristic of the celestial world, as do "the lots of Fate and those who apportion the domiciles" in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 43,13-14). The sheer multiplicity of these powers and the parts of the body that they represent may convey something of the endless multiplicity inherent in matter and the disorderliness and irrationality of the ignorance and psychic passions arising from Sophia's deficiency.[3] The protoplast eventually gains enlightenment when the Mother on high sends him a helper, the spiritual Eve, who causes his merely psychic status to be replaced by a spiritual one.[4] A more typically Platonic view of the origin of souls and bodies is found in *Zostrianos*, according to which souls, bodies and matter exist, not because of the work of an inferior creator, but because of the high deity himself.[5] As indicated in Chapter 13, the

2. The *Apocryphon of John* II 15,13-23: "And the powers began: the first, goodness, created a bone-soul; and the second, foreknowledge, created a sinew-soul; the third, divinity, created a flesh-soul; and the fourth, the lordship, created a marrow-soul; the fifth, kingdom, created a blood-soul; the sixth, envy, created a skin-soul; the seventh, understanding, created a hair-soul."

3. According to the *Hypostasis of the Archons* II 87,11-31, the human is modeled after the body of the archons and after the image of God that appeared in water. They initially produce a material man, and then infuse him with soul (II 88,3-10). Adam, initially inert, then receives "spirit" form the Adamantine land, making him a *living* soul (II 88,10-15), but then becomes endowed merely with soul when Eve is extracted from his side (II 89,3-11), whereupon the spirit is transferred first to Eve and thence to a tree and thence to the snake-instructor, leaving Adam and Eve altogether denuded of the spirit even after eating of the tree of knowledge (II 89,11-90,20) unless one assumes that it may have returned in their production of Seth and Norea. For the inspiration of the divine spirit into psychic Adam, see the *Apocryphon of John* II 19,10-33 and the *Apocalypse* of *Adam* V 66,19-21: "Do you not know that I am the god who created you? And I breathed into you a spirit of life as a living soul."

4. Cf. the *Hypostasis of the Archons* II 89,7-19 and II 90,13-14.

5. *Zostrianos* VIII 73,17-25: "For [this] reason there are those with soul and those without soul; for this reason those who will be saved; for this reason those who will [perish] if they had no [share] in him; for [this] reason there is matter and bodies."

Platonizing Sethian treatises *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes* exhibit a notably positive view of the physical and psychic world, which is regarded, not as evil, but as merely defective and capable of rectification.[6]

The Sethian conception of individual human souls is complicated by its supposition of their existence at various levels, those souls which exist above in the aeons of the Four Luminaries, and those souls of earthly persons.[7] At the transcendent level, one finds the souls of the saints, that is of the "seed of Seth," of "the immovable race," located in the third Light Daveithai, while the souls of those who, though of good conduct (probably of and ascetic sort), are ignorant of the Pleroma but who eventually "repent," are located in the fourth Luminary Eleleth.[8] In addition, there are other, lower yet still non-earthly, levels at which various souls are located, such as those called the Exile and the Repentance in the treatise *Zostrianos*, perhaps to be associated with the respective aeonic places of those mentioned in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 9,14-23), who "persisted for awhile" and those who "repented afterwards."[9]

Evidently, just as in the case of Valentinianism, so too in Sethianism there is the notion of ideal beings who reside in the divine world in

6. In *Allogenes* XI 51,28-32, Autogenes works "successively and individually" so as to rectify nature's flaws or defects; in *Marsanes*, the perceptible world "is worthy to be saved entirely" (X 4,24-5,16; 5,24-26). Although the text may be corrupt, in *Zostrianos* (VIII 131,10-14) it may be that one separates oneself from the physical world in order that *it* might be saved: "Release yourselves, and that which has bound you will be dissolved. Save yourselves, in order that it (masc., i.e., the world? or the soul [fem.]?) may be saved."

7. *Marsanes* X 41,18-22: "They did not understand them, namely the embodied souls upon the earth, as well as those outside of the body, who are in heaven, more numerous than the angels." Cf. *Zostrianos* VIII 27,9-11: "Other immortal souls associate with all these souls because of Sophia who looked down."

8. The *Apocryphon of John* II 9,14-23: "And in the third aeon the seed of Seth was placed over the third Luminary Daveithai. And the souls of the saints were placed there. And in the fourth aeon were placed the souls of those who do not know the pleroma and who did not repent at once, but who persisted awhile and repented afterwards; they are by the fourth Luminary Eleleth."

9. *Zostrianos* VIII 27,9-28,17 and 42,10-44,22. Cf. Philo, *Conf.* 77-78 and discussion of Philo in Chapters 9 and 11.

anticipation of the salvation of their earthly counterparts.[10] It seems that this notion is a gnostic equivalent of Plotinus' later doctrine of the undescended soul, according to which a part of the human soul is always resident in the higher hypostases, while only a portion of it undergoes earthly incarnation.[11] Of course, the main preoccupation is with those souls who live on earth, whose origin can be traced to Sophia's creative attempt; they are to be the object of the higher mother's attempts to rescue the fragments of her substance captured by the creator Yaldabaoth and incarnated into human beings.[12]

In the matter of the salvation of souls, Sethianism offers two distinct methods by which the divine substance is released from its psychic and somatic residence. One group of treatises considers salvation to be conveyed by means of a horizontal, temporally ordered history of divine

10. In Valentinianism, the Savior descends with the transcendent male angels, the "elect," in order to unite them in Pleromatic fashion with their earthly counterparts, the female seed (the "called"); cf. *Val. Exp.* XI 39,25-26; *Exc. Theod.* 2.1; 21,1-3; 39-40.

11. Thus the Four Luminaries, at least in the *Apocryphon of John*, serve not merely as an ideal periodization into the four "ages" (αἰώνες) of the primordial salvation history of Adam, Seth, the seed of Seth, and other repentant souls who will be saved after the time of Noah. They are also heavenly residences (cf. *Trimorphic Protennoia* XIII 50,14-15) not only for the souls of those who have been saved, such as Adam, Seth, his antediluvian seed, and for those Sethians who have died up until the present time, but also for the spiritual counterpart of the race of Seth and certain souls destined, in advance of their earthly life and death, to repent and be elevated to join their counterparts in the Four Luminaries.

12. *Trim. Prot.* XIII 35,12-22: "I am the life of my Epinoia that dwells within every power and every eternal movement and in invisible lights and within the archons and angels and demons and every soul dwelling in Tartaros and in every material soul. I dwell in those who came to be. I move in everyone and I delve into them all. I walk uprightly, and those who sleep I awaken" and XIII 41,20-24: "I am the first one who descended on account of my portion which remains, that is the spirit that dwells in the soul but which originated from the water of life and out of the immersion of the mysteries." In Hippolytus' account of the Sethians, bodily incarnation is like drowning in water (*Ref.* V.19,15-16): the mind is put into human nature like a perfect god in a temple, which is begotten of water; it is intermingled with bodies, but struggles to free itself from them, and cannot find its release or escape; the whole thought and concern of the light from above is, how and by what means the mind may be freed from the death of the wicked and benighted body. Cf. *Ref.* V.19,19-20, where the perfect word of the Light took on the likeness of the serpent/beast, entered into the unclean womb, deceiving it by his likeness to the beast, in order to undo the bonds that constrain the perfect mind; taking the "form of a servant," (cf. Phil 2:5-11) he came down into the virgin's womb.

salvific visitations by successive descents of separate figures or repeated descents of the same figure in different modalities. According to the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (XIII 47,29-48,14; 49,28-50,12) and the Pronoia monologue concluding the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 30,11-31,25), the final saving descent of Barbelo confers the Five Seals, a baptismal rite of visionary ascent that releases the recipient from the somatic prison, stripping away the somatic and psychic thought (ignorance), and replacing it with radiant enlightenment.[13] On the other hand, in the Platonizing Sethian treatises, salvation occurs through a self-performable contemplative technique of successive stages of mental detachment from the world of multiplicity. According to *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* both the body and soul of the visionary are left behind during the ascent. When the ascent is completed, the visionary descends and again dons his psychic and corporeal garment, which is somehow renewed and purified, no longer a burden, but a vehicle by which for sharing the revelation with other embodied souls.[14] By means of the visionary ascent, One experiences assimilation with the divine periodically and briefly in this life as an anticipation and preparation for the final ascent of the soul upon death. Whether in this life or at its end, the ascent of the soul frees it from the constraints of the body, which thereby experiences a "double death" (cf. Porphyry, *Sententiae* 9 Lamberz).

13. See J. D. TURNER, "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 324-351 (esp. 341-351).

14. While not entirely clear in *Zost.* and *Marsanes* owing to their fragmentary condition, according to *Allogenes* and *Steles Seth*, this ascent occurs in three stages: through the levels of the Aeon of Barbelo, through the levels of the Triple Powered One of the Invisible Spirit, culminating in a "primary revelation" or "command" which enables a "non-knowing" knowledge of the Unknowable One. At the beginning of his ascent, Zostrianos "parted from the somatic darkness within me" (VIII 1,10; cf. the "body of darkness" in *Para. Shem* VII 45,32-33) and "cast his body upon the earth to be guarded by glories" (*Zost.* VIII 4,24-25); upon his return, Zostrianos shares his vision with the successively lower realms through which he passes (VIII 129,16-22) and at its terminus says: "Then I came down to the perceptible world and put on my image. Because it was uninstructed, I empowered it and went about preaching the truth to everyone. Neither the angelic beings of the world nor the archons saw me, for I nullified a multitude of [disgraces] that brought me near death" (VIII 130,5-13); this and Zostrianos' initially despondent wish to deliver himself over to "the wild beasts of the desert for a violent death" are perhaps the only clear references to suicide in the Nag Hammadi corpus; cf. Plotinus' challenge to his gnostic opponents to do just that (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 18,1-20).

The doctrine of a hierarchy of souls and their aeonic locations becomes greatly developed in *Zostrianos*, where the four traditional Luminaries not only represent a vertical hierarchy of aeonic repositories for souls located near the periphery of the transcendent world, but are also supplemented with psychic realms below them and with several other sets of luminaries at even higher levels. This elaboration is evident in the comparison of two Sethian accounts of the soul's destiny, one from the *Apocryphon of John* and the other from *Zostrianos*.

II. Two Sethian Treatises on the Soul

Both the *Apocryphon of John* and *Zostrianos* incorporate what once might have been short treatises on the nature and destiny of various kinds of soul. The one in the *Apocryphon of John* seems to have been relatively self-contained, and is presented in the form of a short dialogue between Christ and his interlocutor, John son of Zebedee; bearing the marks of a redactional insertion, it suddenly interrupts the main narrative that has been describing the Protarchon's attempts to control the offspring of Adam and Eve through marital procreation and the sending of Fate and the counterfeit spirit. According to the shorter version in BG and NHC III, those upon whom the spirit of life descends and who have led a pure life will be taken into the aeon of the Four Luminaries,[15] where they will be met by their "receivers," that is, the παραλημπτόρες whom the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 64,22-25) identifies as Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samblo and Abrasax, the ministers of the Four Luminaries. Those of the same category who did not lead a pure life will change for the better and their souls will be taken up to the "rest of the aeons," places here unspecified but which become articulated in other treatises, such as the Repentance and the Sojourn mentioned in *Zostrianos*.

Zostrianos contains two blocks (VIII 42,10-44,22 and 27,19-28,30) of similar teaching offered by the revealer Ephesech which distinguish between spiritually dead souls who apparently die with the body, and those souls capable of saving themselves by leading an independently moral life and rigorously seeking the truth. The distinction from the doctrine of the *Apocryphon of John* is significant; although in both cases moral purity is required, in the *Apocryphon* one is "saved" by receiving

15. Cf. also the plea of Norea in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* II 96,17-28.

the Spirit of Truth, while in *Zostrianos*, one is saved by contemplative passage through transcendental realms until one withdraws into God by withdrawing into oneself.

A. The *Apocryphon of John*

The short "*de anima*" section of the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 64,14-71,2; II 25,16-27,30) distinguishes between two varieties of incarnated souls, those upon whom the Spirit of Life descends, and those upon whom the counterfeit spirit descends. The former comprise both those who did and did not lead a pure life (A1 and 2), while the latter are comprised of three types: those in whom the power of the counterfeit spirit is overcome by the Spirit of life during their first incarnation (B1), those in whom the counterfeit spirit has gained the upper hand and are condemned to another round of incarnation and purgation in which they succeed in remembering their origin (B2), and those who utterly turn away from the Spirit of Life (B3). The first three types will certainly be saved; the fourth, if, after undergoing sufficient reincarnations, it succeeds in acquiring knowledge, will also be saved. Only the fifth type (B3), the souls which utterly turn away from the Spirit of Life, will be eternally punished:

> **II 25** [16] And I said to the Savior, [17] "Lord, will all souls then be brought to salvation [18] in the Pure Light?"
>
> He answered [19] me, "These are important matters [20] that have arisen in your mind. For it is [21] difficult to disclose them to any [22] except these who are from [23] the immovable race:
>
> **A1** These upon whom the Spirit of life [24] comes and joins with the power, [25] will be saved and become perfect, [26] and become worthy of the greatness (BG 65,3-8 and III 33,4-7 have "to enter these great Luminaries"), and [27] they will be purified there from [28] every wickedness and from anxieties about evil, [29] and they will thus be anxious about nothing except [30] incorruptibility alone, directing their concern toward it [31] from here, without anger or <envy> or jealousy [32] or desire or greed for [33] anything, since they are detained by [34] nothing, except the substance [35] of flesh alone, which they carry around, anticipating [36] the time when they will be visited **26** [1] by the receivers. Persons of this sort [2] are worthy of eternal, [3] incorruptible life and the calling, since they endure [4] everything and bear [5] everything, so that they might complete [6] the <contest> and inherit [7] eternal life."

I said to him, "Lord, [8] the souls who have not done these things, [9] though the power <and> Spirit of life [10] has come upon them, {IV 40,24-25: will they be [rejected]?"

A2 He answered and said to me, "If} the [11] Spirit {IV 40,25-26: descends on them,} they will by all means be saved [12] and depart. For the [13] power will come upon every person, [14] since without it, it would be impossible for anyone to stand. [15] After they are born, then, [16] if the Spirit of life increases, [17] the power also comes and strengthens that soul, [18] and nothing is able to lead it astray [19] into works of evil. [20] But those upon whom the Counterfeit Spirit [21] comes are drawn away by [22] it and go astray."

And I [23] said, "Lord, when therefore the souls of [24] these persons leave the [25] flesh, where will they go?"

B1 He laughed [26] and said to me, "That soul in whom the power [27] will become greater than the Despicable Spirit [28] —for it is strong—flees from [29] evil, and through [30] the visitation of this incorruptibility, it is rescued [31] and brought up to the repose [32] of the aeons."

I said, "Lord, [33] then those, too, who have not realized [34] to whom they belong, where will their souls [36] go?"

B2 And he said to me, [37] "In those persons the Despicable Spirit **27** [1] has increased when they went astray, and it [2] burdens the soul and pulls it [3] toward the deeds of evil and casts [4] it into forgetfulness. After (the soul) [5] departs, it is delivered to the hands of the authorities [6] who came into being from the ruler. And [7] it is bound with chains and cast [8] into the prison and they consort with (the soul) [9] until it awakens from forgetfulness and [10] receives knowledge unto itself. And if it [11] becomes perfect in this way, it is saved."

But I [12] said, "Lord, how does the soul become small [13] and return into the nature [14] of its Mother or into the Human?"

At that point, [15] when I asked him about this, he was jubilant, and [16] he said to me, "Truly you are blessed, [17] since you have understood! That soul [18] is caused to follow another in whom is the Spirit of [19] life, by which (the other soul) [20] is saved. Thus, it is not [21] cast into flesh again."

And I said, [22] "Lord, these, too, who have known, but [23] have turned away, where will their [24] souls go?"

B3 Then he said to me, "They will be taken to that place [25] to which the angels of Poverty will go, [26] the place [27] in which there is no repentance, and [28] they will be guarded until the day [29] on which those who have blasphemed the Spirit will be tortured. [30] And they will be punished with eternal punishment."

Salvation for those souls united with the Spirit seems to be undifferentiated and immediate upon death; they are raised by their "receivers" to eternal imperishable life, having been purified from evil "there" (BG 65,3-11; II 25,23-9), perhaps within aeons subjacent to the Four Luminaries functioning as a sort of purgatory. In the interim, as the Pronoia monologue puts it (II 31,16-25), one must protect oneself from the angels of poverty and demons of chaos and be sealed with the Five Seals to completely disarm the power of death. Moreover, those souls who have been dominated by the counterfeit spirit and remain in ignorance still have a chance for salvation via the process of reincarnation, during which other elect souls will enable them to reach knowledge, be initiated, and thus escape further reincarnations. Those souls that are influenced by the counterfeit spirit and do not repent in their lifetime and must undergo purifying punishment upon their death constitute an interesting case; their final return to their true nature is accomplished by following another soul that possesses the Spirit of Life, a view very close to that of Calvisius Taurus.[16] Only those who apostatize from prior knowledge of the Spirit of Truth will suffer eternal punishment; the mass of humanity is saved, and only a few are lost. Thus there are distinct grades of salvation for differing types of persons as in Valentinian doctrine, nor does there seem to be an ultimate restoration of all things to their original state.

B. *Zostrianos*

A very similar notion occurs in *Zostrianos* VIII 45,1-47,27, where the cause of reincarnation is due to distraction from contemplation rather than to the intrusion of a counterfeit spirit, and the function of the guiding soul is performed by certain glories:

> **VIII 45** [1] I said to the child of the child [2] Ephesech who was with me, "Can [3] your wisdom instruct me about [4] the dissipation of the (type of) person [5] that is saved? Who [6] are the ones mixed with it, and [7] who are those that divide it, [8] so that the living elect [9] might know?" Then the [10] child of the child [11] Ephesech, [speaking] openly, told me: [12] "When (this type) repeat-

16. Taurus *apud* Iamblichus, *De anima*, in Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.49.39,44-53: "the souls are sent into the world ... for the perfection of the All ... for this is the will of the gods, to make the gods manifest through [human] souls; for the gods become visible and show themselves through the pure and uncontaminated life of [human] souls."

edly withdraws [13] into itself alone [14] and is occupied with [15] the knowledge of other things, [16] since the intellect and immortal [soul] do [not] [17] intelligize, it thereupon [18] experiences deficiency, [19] for it too turns, has nothing, and [20] separates from it (the intellect) and [21] stands [apart] and experiences [22] an alien [impulse] [23] instead of becoming a unity. [24] So that (type of person) resembles many forms. [25] And when it turns aside, it [26] comes into being seeking those things that [27] do not exist. When it [28] descends to them in thought, [29] it cannot understand them [30] in any other way unless **46** [1] it be enlightened, and it becomes [2] a physical entity. Thus this type of person [3] accordingly descends into generation, [4] and becomes speechless because of the [5] difficulties and indefiniteness [6] of matter. Although possessing [7] eternal, immortal power, [8] (this type) is bound in the clutches of [9] the body, [removed], [10] and [continually] bound [11] within strong bonds, [12] lacerated [13] by every evil spirit, until [14] it once more [reconstitutes itself] and begins again [15] to inhabit it. Therefore, [16] for their salvation, there have been appointed [17] specific powers, and these same ones inhabit [18] this world. And among the Self-generated ones [19] there stand at each [20] [aeon] certain glories [21] so that one who is in the [world] [22] might be saved alongside [them]. The glories are [23] perfect living concepts; it is [im-] [24] possible that they perish because [they are] patterns [25] of salvation, that is to say, anyone [26] receiving them will be rescued to them, [27] and being patterned and [28] empowered by this same (pattern), and [29] having that glory as a helper, [30] one thus passes through the world [31] [and every aeon]. And there **47** [1] are the guardians of the immortal [2] soul:

Gamaliel and [3] Strempsouchos;
Akramas [4] and Loel, and Mnesinous [5] [are] immortal spirits;
Yesseus [6] [M]azareu[s] Ye[s]sedekeus is [7] [the commander]
[who] belongs to the Child, [8] [the Savior],
the Child of the Child, even [9] [the one who knows you]; and
Ormos [10] is [Delimiter] over the living seed, [11] and
Kam[ali]el is the Spirit-giver; [12]
The Attendants are [13] Isauel and Audael and [A]brasax; [14]
the Myriads, Phaleris, Phalses, [15] [and] Eurios;
the Guardians of [16] glory, Stetheus, [17] Theo[pe]mptos, Eurumeneus [18] and Olsen.
The Helpers [in] [19] every matter are Ba[thor]mos, [20] [I]son, Eir[o]n, Lalameus, [21] Eidomeneus and Authrou[n]ios; [22]
the Judges are Sumphthar, [23] Eukrebos and Keilar; [24]
the Rapturer, Samblo; [25]
the Angels who guide [26] the misty clouds, Sappho [27] and Thouro."

Just like the *Apocryphon of John*, *Zostrianos* (VIII 42,10-44,22 and 27,19-28,30) distinguishes between various types of souls and their destinies. The major distinction is made between the souls of spiritually dead persons and the classes of salvageable souls located at the levels of

the Self-begotten ones, the Repentance and the Sojourn, namely souls who innately know the truth, souls who at first sinned but then repented and sought the truth, and souls who "follow the ways of others":

VIII 42 [10] Now the [one who repents and] [11] the sojourner [are with the one inhabiting] [12] the perceptible [world]. [13] He lives with the dead. [They] [14] all [come to a single thing. They] [15] attain salvation [apart from] [16] the dead. Now not [all] of them [17] needed salvation [18] initially, but it is a greater salvation [19] since they are greatly inferior. [20]

As for the (type of) person that is dead: [21] its soul, [its mind] and [22] its body [are] all [dead]. [23] Sufferings [of the subtle], [24] fathers of [material men], [25] [they are demons that] [26] the fire [consumes]. [27] [They are worldly ...] [28] ... [...] [29] ... [...] [30] ... [...] **43** [1] that is transformed.

The second (type of) [2] person is the immortal soul [3] that inhabits dead things, [4] concerning itself with them; [for] [5] it then [undertakes] a search for [6] particular benefits [7] [and it] experiences [8] bodily suffering. It (the soul) [9] [is treated corporeally], and it [10] [forgets that it has] [11] an eternal god; it [12] associates with daimons. [13]

Now the humanity in the [14] Sojourn: if [15] it inwardly possesses a discovery of the [16] truth, it is far [17] from the deeds of others [18] who live [wickedly] and [stumble].

[19] As for the (type of) person that repents: [20] if it renounces [21] dead things and desires [22] real things—immortal [23] mind and immortal soul— [24] [it is going to] be zealous about them [25] by first undertaking for itself an inquiry [26] not just about action [27] but of the results. [28] For from this he [receives a] [29] [conception. The entire place] and [30] [every] attainment [will be his].

44 [1] Now the (type of) person that can be saved [2] is the one that seeks itself and [3] its intellect and finds each [4] of them. And how much power [5] this (type) has! The person [6] that has been saved is one who has not known [7] about these things [merely] as [8] they (formally) exist, but one [9] who is personally involved with [the] rational faculty [10] as it exists [in him]. [11] He has grasped their [image that is different] [12] in every situation as though they had become [13] simple and one. For then [14] this (type) is saved who can [15] pass through [them] all; [16] [he becomes] [17] them all. Whenever it [18] [wishes], it again parts [19] from all these matters and [20] withdraws into itself; [21] for it becomes divine, [22] having withdrawn into god.

VIII 27 [19] Do not be amazed about the [20] differences among souls. [21] When one thinks that they are different, [22] they are [dis]similar; they are [parts] [23] of things [already dead]. [24] One person [appears] [25] in a [soul] and is [completely] corrupt, [26] and their [souls] [27] [come to be in their] body; another [28] [who is within] his time [29] [appears] while **27** [1] their soul exists [within] [2] their body. Now those who are [3] completely [corrupt] are four, [4] while

those [within] [5] time are nine. Each one [6] of them has its character [7] and habit. Though similar, they [8] are different, distinct, and [9] permanent.

And other immortal souls [10] associate with all [11] these souls because of [12] the Sophia who looked down. [13] For there are three kinds of [14] immortal souls:

The ones who have [15] taken root upon the Sojourn [16] have a self-generated [17] power; they [18] follow the ways of [19] others. Another, being of a [20] single kind, is one who [21] [is self-possessed].

(Second), those that [22] stand [upon the] Repentance, who [23] [were not ambivalent about] sin, [24] since knowledge is sufficient [for] them. [25] Although they are neophytes [they still sin]. [26] Yet it (this type) has distinctions too, [27] [for every] one has [28] sinned with others [and] **28** [1] has repented with others [2] [although they appear] alone. [3] For there are [three] sub-classes of these, [4] namely, those who have committed [5] all the sins and have repented, [6] or those destined to sin, [7] or those who sin intentionally. [8] Therefore, their aeons also are six [9] according to the place attained [10] by each of their (souls).

The third [11] (major kind) is that of the souls of [12] the Self-generated ones, because they [13] have a word of the ineffable [14] truth existing in [15] knowledge as well as self-generated [power] [16] and eternal [life]. [17] [And] they have four distinctions [18] in the same manner: the forms [19] of angels, [20] those who love the truth, [21] those who hope, and those who believe. [22] [Indeed], they [also] have [syzygies], [23] and they exist [within them]. [24] They exist [as four aeons of] [25] the Self-generated ones. [The first] is [26] the one belonging to [perfect Life]; [27] the [second] is [the one belonging to Mentality]. The [28] [third is the one belonging to eternal] [29] Knowledge; the fourth is [30] the one [belonging to the] immortal [souls].

Both the passage from the *Apocryphon of John* and from *Zostrianos* draw their imagery from Plato's myths concerning the transmigration of the soul (*Phaedo* 113D-114E; *Gorgias* 523A-6C; *Phaedrus* 248C-249C; *Republic* X 614B-621B). The differences in souls appear to be related to the succession of births experienced by the soul, e.g., the four grades of souls in *Phaedo* 113D-114E: holy souls, either ordinary ones incarnated by birth at earth's surface or those of philosophers who become bodiless (i.e., the "self-generated" kind); the souls of those neither very good nor very bad (i.e. "those ambivalent about sin," who inhabit the Sojourn); curable sinners who repent (i.e. who inhabit the Repentance); and the souls of wicked, incurable sinners (i.e., those who are "dead"). Further allusions to Platonic material are also present, e.g., to the nine births of *Phaedrus* 248D-E, to the prospect of conjoining (as syzygies) with those

who seek wisdom (*Phaedrus* 249A), and to the distinction between curable and incurable sins in *Gorgias* 525A-B, as well as a reference to the soul of the philosopher who hasn't meddled with other's affairs in *Gorgias* 526C.

III. Ritual and Theurgical Practices and the Soul's Ascent

A. The Celestial Baptismal Ritual

The centrality of a specific baptismal rite throughout most of Sethian history was emphasized in Chapter 6, where it was pointed out that, in the case of the Platonizing Sethian treatises, the original earthly rite is transcendentalized; just as enlightenment is now obtained by a practice of visionary ascension, so also baptism in the living waters is now experienced on the heavenly rather than earthly plane. Indeed, Zostrianos' ascent through the Barbelo Aeon is marked out by a series of celestial baptisms. *Zostrianos* subdivides the Aeon of Barbelo into three levels, from highest to lowest: Kalyptos ("hidden"), Protophanes ("first-appearing"), and Autogenes ("self-generated"). The salvific function of these subaeons becomes apparent by their association with 1) certain baptismal waters:

VIII 15 [4] It is the water of Life that [5] belongs to Vitality in which you now [6] have been baptized in the Autogenes. [7] It is the [water] of Blessedness [8] that [belongs] to Knowledge in which you [9] will be [baptized] in the Protophanes. [10] It is the water of Existence [11] [which] belongs to Divinity, that is, [12] to Kalyptos.

VIII 22 [4] And [5] the universal intelligence joins in [6] when the [7] water of Autogenes is complete. [8] When one knows it and [9] all these, one has to do with the [10] water of Protophanes; when [11] one unites with him and all these, [12] one has to do with Kalyptos.

with 2) certain "seals" located on a crown of [light] bestowed by Yesseus Mazareus Yessedekeus (usually a Sethian name for "the living water"), apparently signifying the receipt of "a holy spirit":

VIII 58 [13] And the seals [of this] kind [14] are those belonging to [Autogenes] [15] and Protophanes and [16] Kalyptos.

and with 3) certain kinds of visionary and auditory experiences:

VIII 24 [2] With perfect soul he [sees] those [3] of the Autogenic ones; with Intellect, [4] those of the Triple Male; with [5] Holy Spirit, those of the Proto-

phanic [6] ones. He hears about Kalyptos [7] through the powers of the Spirit from whom they [8] have come forth in a far superior [9] revelation of the Invisible [10] Spirit. And by means of the thought [11] which now exists in silence and [12] within the First Thought, (he hears) about the Triple [13] Powered Invisible Spirit; it [14] is, moreover, an audition and a silent power [15] purified with life-giving spirit, [16] the perfect, [first] perfect, [17] and all-perfect one.

Since the waters associated with each of these three subaeons signify the reception of one of the three powers of the Invisible Spirit, baptism into each successive one enables ascending degrees of spiritual enlightenment or knowledge:

VIII 23 [17] According [18] to each locale one has [19] a portion of the [20] eternal ones [and] ascends [21] [to them. As] one [22] [becomes pure and] simple, [23] just so one continually [approaches] [24] unity. Being [always] [25] pure and [simple], [26] one is filled [with Mentality,] [27] with Existence [and Essence], [28] and a holy Spirit. There is **24** [1] nothing of him outside of him.

Baptism into the waters of Autogenes signifies or enables a recognition of the reality of individual souls and ideal forms of individual things; one becomes a "perfect individual":

VIII 17 [6] Therefore the first perfect water of [7] the Triple Powered One, <that of> Autogenes, [8] [is] Life for the perfect souls, [9] for it is a rational expression of [10] the perfect god's creativity .... [15] [But] he who simultaneously knows [16] [how he exists] and what [17] [the] living [water is], [18] [such a one] lives within [19] [knowledge. That which belongs to knowledge] is the [20] [water of] Vital[ity]. And in [21] [becoming, Life] becomes [limitless] [22] [that it may receive] its [own Being].

VIII 22 [13] Similarly among the [14] aeons: as regards knowing these individually [15] along with their parts, they are [perfect]. Those [16] of the Entirety where [17] knowledge is and that which they know [18] have [become distinct], yet [19] they have something in common [20] with one another. The Entirety and all [21] [these have the] [22] immersion in the [baptism of the] [23] [Autogenes].

Baptism into the waters of Protophanes signifies or enables an ability to recognize the undifferentiated unity that characterizes individual souls and ideal forms; one becomes an "all perfect" one who is "unified":

VIII 22 [4] And [5] the universal intelligence joins in [6] when the [7] water of Autogenes is complete. [8] When one knows it and [9] all these, one has to do with the [10] water of Protophanes.

VIII 23 [1] That one, exhibiting himself [2] as one who has come to know how [3] he belongs to him and experiences [4] mutual fellowship, [5] has washed in the baptism of Protophanes.

Baptism into the waters of Kalyptos signifies or enables an ability to recognize the absolute unity and single source of all souls and all ideal realities; one becomes "truly existing" and "super-perfect":

VIII 19 [4] The path of ascent that is higher [5] than perfect (is) likewise with Kalyptos.

VIII 23 [6] And if one understands their [7] origin, [8] how they are all manifest in [9] a single principle, and how [10] all who are joined come to [11] be divided, and how those [12] who were divided join [13] again, and how the parts [14] [join with] the wholes and the [15] species with the [genera]—when [16] one understands these things—one has washed [17] in the baptism of Kalyptos.

In the course of his ascent into the Barbelo Aeon, Zostrianos is baptized five times by a traditional set of celestial Sethian powers in the name of Autogenes and is transformed into various grades of angel. He is baptized two more times by Youel in living water in the presence of the Triple Male Child, where he receives form, semblance, light, a holy spirit, and sight (VIII 59,25-62,10). At this point the series of baptisms ends. Although he comes to stand before Protophanes as "truly existing," the remainder of the text, at times badly damaged, gives no indication that he is ever actually baptized in the waters of Protophanes and Kalyptos. Instead, he is anointed by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon, and, after their lengthy revelation, is brought before Protophanes, empowered, inscribed in glory, sealed and crowned, becoming "all-perfect."

Prior to his five baptisms in the lowest level of the Barbelo Aeon, Zostrianos undergoes a series of preliminary baptisms corresponding to the initial stages of his ascent. In order to arrive at the Self-generated Aeons, the lowest level of the Barbelo Aeon, Zostrianos ascends on a luminous cloud. Leaving his physical body and perhaps the lower components of his soul on earth, he ascends with his angelic escort through the thirteen aeons of the sublunary realm presided over by the archon of creation (VIII 4,20-5,10; cf. the *Gospel of the Egyptians* III 63,17-18). In his first baptism, evidently at the level of the moon, he is assimilated to the image of the glories (VIII 5,11-17). He next traverses the "airy earth," that is, the realm of the seven planets—called the Aeonic Copies—and is baptized once for each of their aeons (VIII 5,17-23). Next,

abandoning the cosmos, he arrives at the Sojourn—likely the place where disembodied souls reside between periods of reincarnation—and he is again baptized. Ascending to the Repentance—perhaps the place where such disembodied souls make the choice that determines their next reincarnation—he is baptized six times, is empowered and ascends to the Self-generated Aeons, where he undergoes the five baptisms in the name of Autogenes. Later on the text distinguishes between the various baptisms appointed for those who attain the rank of sojourners, the repentant, the perfect individuals in the Autogenes Aeon, the all-perfect in the Protophanes Aeon, and those who truly exist in the Kalyptos Aeon:

> **VIII 24** [28] [For each] of the aeons [29] [there is] a baptism [30] [of this sort]. Now if [31] [one] strips off the world **25** [1] and lays aside [nature], [2] whether one is a sojourner, without [3] dwelling place or power, [4] following the practices of [5] others, or whether one repents, [6] having committed no sin, [7] being satisfied with knowledge (and) [8] without concern for anything (worldly), [9] baptisms are appointed [10] respectively for these; it is the path [11] into the Self-generated ones. (There is) the one (in the name of Autogenes) [12] in which you have now been baptized each [13] time, which is appropriate for seeing the [perfect] [14] individuals; it is a knowledge [15] of everything, having originated [16] from the powers of the Self-generated ones. [17] (There is) the one you will perform when you transfer [18] to the all-perfect aeons (of Protophanes). [19] When you wash in the third [20] baptism, [then] you will learn [21] about those [that] truly [exist] [22] in [that] place (i.e., of Kalyptos).

But as far as the present state of the text allows one to follow the narrative, Zostrianos never receives baptisms at the level of Protophanes and Kalyptos. After the lengthy revelation of Ephesech and Zostrianos' fifth baptism in the name of Autogenes, Ephesech is replaced by Youel, who baptizes Zostrianos twice more as he stands immediately before the Protophanes Aeon in the company of the Self-generated Aeons gazing upon the Triple Male Child (VIII 56,24-64,7). Limited as it is to the lowest levels of the Barbelo Aeon, Zostrianos' baptismal ascent stands in apparent contrast to the ascents described in *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*, where those respective visionaries—evidently without the benefit of any explicit transcendental baptisms—ascend to the summit of the Barbelo Aeon and beyond, even experiencing the three powers of the Invisible Spirit. Zostrianos' baptisms and direct visions seem to terminate immediately before the Aeon of Protophanes; beginning with the Kalyptos ("hidden") Aeon, those realities and the ones beyond are hidden from

his direct observation, and are made available to him only by the hearing of revelatory discourse—which nevertheless informs him of matters unknown even to gods and angels (VIII 128,15-18)!

In addition to these twenty-two baptisms, two final ritual acts occur during the ascent: chrism and coronation. Zostrianos is anointed by certain glories prior to the final revelation from the Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo (VIII 63,20-22), and upon completion of this revelation, he is brought before Protophanes and "inscribed in glory and sealed," whereupon he receives a perfect crown (VIII 129,2-6), presumably of the sort he had seen prior to the Luminaries' revelation and whose nature was explained by Youel (VIII 57,4-59,7). Similarly in *Allogenes*, Youel anoints Allogenes just before she speaks to him of the Triple Powered One (XI 52,13-33) and hands Allogenes over to the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon for the final revelation.

All these ritual actions are of a traditional nature, well-attested in other Sethian texts.[17] Thus in VIII 6,7-17 there is evidence of a sequence of ritual acts including baptism in the name of Autogenes by Micheus and Michar, purification by Barpharanges, and glorification and sealing—perhaps equivalent to coronation—by Gamaliel and Gabriel (cf. VIII 57,7-9; 58,20-26), although at this point Zostrianos explicitly experiences only baptism in the name of Autogenes. Apparently, *Zostrianos* has interpreted baptism and chrism as preparation for the receipt of higher revelation and vision of transcendent reality, while sealing and coronation signify its actual receipt.

The significance of each of Zostrianos' multiple baptisms is only partially apparent, although they obviously signify levels of spiritual preparedness and achievement, and mark stages in a vertically-conceived ascent. A single baptism marks his ascent to the superlunary realm, and

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17. In particular, see the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the sequence: investiture, baptism, enthronement, glorification, and rapture in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, XIII 48,14-30. In general, see J. D. TURNER, "Ritual in Gnosticism," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 87-97 (earlier version in *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 33 [1994], 136-181), and "To See The Light: A Gnostic Appropriation of Jewish Priestly Practice and Sapiential and Apocalyptic Visionary Lore," *Mediators of the Divine: Horizons of Prophecy and Divination in Mediterranean Antiquity*, ed. R. M. Berchman (Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 163; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998), 63-113.

seven more mark his ascent through the seven planetary orbits. A single baptism marks his entry into the Sojourn, probably where disembodied souls assemble before making the choice that determines their future embodiment, and in the apparent place of that choice, the Repentance, Zostrianos is baptized six times, once for each of its six levels, defined by whether or not one has actually sinned and if having sinned, how much they sinned, whether or not they intended to do so, and whether or not they repented (cf. VIII 27,21-28,10). The fivefoldness of his baptisms in the name of Autogenes is explained by the initial baptism's reference to the powers generally invoked in the traditional Sethian baptismal rite called "the Five Seals." Unfortunately, the damaged text surrounding the mention of his two final baptisms by Youel leaves their precise significance a mystery, although they clearly have to do with "seeing" the invisible reality associated with the Triple Male Child. The significance of Zostrianos' chrism at the entrance to the Protophanes Aeon prior to the final revelation discourse is unclear, as is the significance of his sealing, glorification and crowning upon its completion. The crown may represent success in a spiritual ordeal, but the sealing—and its relation to the four seals on the crowns, of which only three receive any explanation (VIII 57,21-58,27)—still remains obscure.

B. Ecstatic Prayer and Theurgical Utterances

Zostrianos, *Allogenes*, and the *Three Steles of Seth* share a common tradition of ecstatic prayer that may have had theurgical significance. Each of the treatises has incorporated what appears to have been a single doxological prayer drawn from liturgical material associated with the ritual of visionary ascent of the sort attested in the *Three Steles of Seth*. While the final part of the prayer included in the *Three Steles of Seth* occurs in the third stele directed to the praise of the supreme pre-existent One, the initial part preserved in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* seems to be oriented towards the Barbelo Aeon, in particular toward the process by which it unfolds from the Triple Powered One of the Invisible Spirit's three powers, Existence (missing in *Allogenes*), Vitality or Life, and Mentality or Blessedness, as the terms here in boldface indicate:

Zostrianos VIII 86,13-23; 88,9-22; 51,24-52,8	*Allogenes* XI 54,6-37	*Three Steles of Seth* VII 126,5-13
86 [13] You are great, Aphr[edon]. [14] You are perfect, Neph[redon].' [15] To his **Existence** she says: [16] 'You are great, Deipha[neus]'— [17]	(viz. "According to that Existence of thine ... even the ... from which derives Perfection:") **54** [6] thou art [7] [great, Deiphan]eus! Solmis, [8] [thou art great]!	
she [is] his activity and **Life** [18] and Divinity— [19]	According to the **Vitality** [9] [that is thine, even] the first activity [10] from which derives [11] Divinity: Thou art great, [12] Armedon! Thou art perfect, [13] Epiphaneus! And according to that activity [14] of thine, the second power [15] and the **Mentality** from [16] which derives **Blessedness**: [17]	
'You are great, Harmedo[n], [20] the [all-] glorious one, Epi-ph[aneus]'		
— [21] his **Blessedness** and [22] the perfection [of] the [23] unity.		
88 [8] '[I] [9] bless [you ...] [10] O Be[ritheus, Erigenaor], [11] Or[imeni]os, Ar[amen], [12] Alphl[eges], Elilio-[upheus], [13] Lalameus, Noetheus! [14] Your name is great [and] [15] strong. He who knows [you] [16] knows everything. You are [17] one, you are one, Sious, Ei[ron], [18] Aphredon! You are the [aeon] [19] of the aeons of the [20] perfect great one, the first [21] Kalyptos of the [third] [22] activity!'	Autoer, Beritheus, [18] Erigenaor, Orimenios, Aramen, [19] Alphleges, Eleliopheus, [20] Lalameus, Yetheus, Noetheus! [21] Thou art great! He who knows thee [22] knows the All! Thou art one, thou [23] art one, he who is good, Aphredon! [24]	
	Thou art the Aeon of [25] aeons, he who is perpetually!" [26]	
	Then she praised [27] the entire One, saying: [28] Lalameus, Noetheus, Senaon, [29] Asineus, Ori-	**126** [5] [O] blessed concealed (aeon) [6] Senaon, [who begets himself] from its own

Zostrianos VIII 86,13-23; 88,9-22; 51,24-52,8	*Allogenes* XI 54,6-37	*Three Steles of Seth* VII 126,5-13
51 [24] 'You are one, you are [25] [one], you are one, O Child **52** [1] of [...] [2] Yato[menos ...] [3] exist [...] [4] ... [...] [5] you [...]. [6] You are one, you [are one ...] [7] Semelel [...] [8] Telmachae[l ...] [9] Omothem [..] [10] male ... [...] [11] [the] engenderer [of glory, the] [12] ruler of [glory, the] [13] lovable one, he [of] all [the] [14] absolutely all-perfect ones. [15] Akron [...]. [16] O Triple Male: AA [AAA] [17] ΩΩΩΩΩ BI TPEIΣ E[IΣ]! [18] You are spirit from [19] spirit; you are light [20] from light; you are [silence] [21] from silence; [you are] [22] thought from thought, [23] O [perfect] Child of [24] the god ⲍⲛⲩ [...] [25] ⲩⲱⲗ	phanios, [30] Mellephaneus, Elemaon{}, [31] <I>smoun, Optaon, He who [32] is! Thou art He who is, [33] the Aeon of aeons, the [34] Unbegotten One higher than the unbegotten ones, [35] Yatomenos, thou alone [36] for whom all the unborn ones were begotten, [37] the Unnameable one!	self, [7] [Asi]neus, [8] [...]ephneus, Optaon, O great power, Elemaon, [9] Emouniar, [10] Nibareus, Kandephoros, Aphredon, [11] Deiphaneus! It is you [12] who are Armedon (for) these: O you who produce powers, [13] O Thalanatheus, Antitheus!

The beings invoked belong to the Aeon of Barbelo and are associated with its subaeons Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes. The version of the prayer in *Allogenes* seems the most complete and unified, and may be the version closest to the source of the prayer. The *Three Steles of Seth* seems only to cite the conclusion to the prayer; while it directs this segment to the figure of Senaon, *Allogenes* directs it to "the entire one," within which Senaon is merely an included figure. The version in *Zostrianos* is unusual in that it distributes segments of what appears to have been an integral prayer into two separate parts of the treatise: the initial part is located in the context of the final revelation to Zostrianos by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon, where they depict the Kalyptos Aeon's praise of Barbelo (further subdivided into a portion spoken by Kalyptos and another spoken in the plural by members of his aeon). What seems

(according to the version in *Allogenes*) to have been its final part is located much earlier in the treatise, where it is directed to the entire Aeon of Barbelo and apparently spoken by Zostrianos in concert with certain others on the occasion of his firth baptism in the name of Autogenes. The *Three Steles of Seth*—in keeping with its character as a prayer book for a community-oriented ritual of ascent—has the prayer spoken in the plural by any Sethian who would undergo the ascent, while *Allogenes* portrays the prayer as spoken in the singular by the revealer Youel at a point prior to the primary revelation from the Luminaries of the Barbelo.[18]

The conclusion of the prayer in *Zostrianos* also contains *nomina barbara* otherwise unattested in other Sethian texts, indecipherable graphic tokens (συνθήματα), and it contains instances of letters to be chanted and perhaps to be interpreted (e.g., AA[AAA] ΩΩΩΩΩ BI TPEIΣ E[IΣ], which might mean something like "fivefold first and last; twice times 10,000 times three in one"). Two other similar instances of such character strings occur in *Zostrianos*, involving both repetition and position in the sequence (κλίματα) of vowels, one reads:

> **VIII 118** [16] You are the [triad] [17] who [is] thrice [replicated: AAA] [18] EEE.' [19] [They are] the first seven [vowels]. [19] [Now] the third [vowel and] [20] the second [vowel are these: EEE] [21] EEEE AAAAAAA [...] [22] And this [has four ...]

and the other apparently plays upon repetition as well as forms of the Greek verb "to be" and forms of the noun "life" (ζωή) and verb (ζάω) "to live":

> **VIII 127** [1] 'ΦΟΗ ΖΟΗ ΖΗΩΗ ΖΗ[ΩΗ] ΖΩΣΙ [2] ΖΩΣΙ ΖΑΩ ΖΗΟΟΟ ΖΗΣΕΝ ΖΗΣΕΝ [3] The individuals and the four [4] who are eightfold are alive! [5] HOOOO HA HΩ! It is you who are before [6] them, you who are in them [7] all!'

18. A doxology very similar to the end of the version in *Allogenes* appears in a "Prayer of Set" (ϵΥΧΗ ϹΗΤ) published by W. BRASHEAR, "Seth-Gebet" (mit Abbildungen 3-4), *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 42.1 (1996), 26-34; plates II-III. This doxological prayer is written immediately before a colophon on the lower half of a leaf from an ostensibly second or third century papyrus codex, apparently as "space filler" rather like the Hermetic prayer of thanksgiving in NHC VI 63,33-65,7 and the prayer of the apostle Paul on the front flyleaf of NHC I AI-B10. It appears to contain the names Sunaôn, Mell[e]phaou, El[l]emm[aôni], Smoun, Eptaôn, as well as the word ὑψιφρόνη, the feminine being featured in the Nag Hammadi tractate by that name (NHC XI,*4, Hypsiphrone*).

These are clearly intended as syllables of power.[19] Sometimes they are enigmatic abbreviations for articulate utterances, sometimes they have nearly the character of Hindu mantras, as in the chanting of strings of vowels in semi-numerical groupings, where the emphasis seems to lie on the rhythm, sonority and repetitiveness of the verbal performance, possibly in a communal setting. The indecipherable graphic tokens, appearing in *Zostrianos* (VIII 51,24-25) seem intended to be seen rather than spoken; perhaps they were for private appropriation on the part of a reader rather than communal recitation, and thus approach the phenomenon of the "reading mystery" (*Lesemysterium*, a term coined by Reitzenstein to characterize the graduated reading of treatises within the *Corpus Hermeticum*). If so, *Zostrianos* would have functioned within both a private and communal setting. The closely-related *Three Steles of Seth*, where the same kind of ecstatic prayer appears (VII 125,23-126,17) as part of a collection of hymns directed to Pigeradamas, Autogenes, Barbelo, and the pre-existent One, clearly presupposes a communal setting:[20]

> **VII 127** [6] Whoever [7] remembers these (hymns) and always [8] glorifies shall be [9] perfect among those who are perfect [10] and impassive beyond [11] all things; [12] for individually and collectively they all praise [13] these: and afterward they shall be [14] silent. And just as it has [15] been ordained for them, they will ascend. [16] After silence, they will descend [17] from the third: [18] they will bless the second; [19] and afterward, the first. [20] The way of ascent is the way [21] of descent.

Zostrianos exhibits two main kinds of ritual practice, baptism and ecstatic speech and prayer, that have been inherited from an older baptismal cult and incorporated into a practice of visionary ascent intended to achieve enlightenment and therefore salvation. In the process, both forms of ritual practice have been interpreted as transcendental acts through which the aspirant is assimilated to increasingly more stable forms of transcendental reality represented by an ascending series of aeonic realms, entrance into which is assisted by revelations from various savior figures: an angel of light, various glories including Authrounios, Ephesech Child of the Child, Youel Mother of the Glories, and the Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo.

Beginning at the level of the Self-generated Aeons, the Aeon of Barbelo—representing the Intellect of the supreme deity—presents itself in three fundamental aeonic levels presided over by Autogenes, Protophanes, and Kalyptos. Each of these is associated with a certain baptismal water, immersion in which effects assimilation to the nature of the inhabitants of that respective aeon. The visionary undergoes respective transformations of consciousness from separate individuality, through an awareness of collective unification, to the ultimate stability of pure being and ideal existence. The effectiveness of each type of baptismal water is attributed to empowerment by a respective power of the supreme Triple Powered deity, first the Vitality of potential existence, then the Blessedness of true knowledge and determinate existence, and ultimately, sheer Existence beyond being altogether. Each phase of spiritual awareness is further marked by acts of vision and praise whose utterance confirms one's possession of that phase and an awareness of the position in the spiritual hierarchy that has been achieved.

19. See B. A. PEARSON, "Theurgic Tendencies in Gnosticism and Iamblichus' Conception of Theurgy," in *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism*, ed. R. T. Walls and J. Bregman (Studies in Neoplatonism, Ancient and Modern 6; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 253-276, esp. 258-260, quoting Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* I.12 41,16-42,5 Des Places: the soul, "leaving behind her own life has exchanged it for the most blessed energy of the gods. If, therefore, the ascent through invocations bestows on the priests purification from passions, deliverance from generation, and unity with the divine principle, how then could anyone connect it with passions? For such (an invocation) does not draw the impassible and pure (gods) down to passibility and impurity, but, on the contrary, it makes us, who had become passible through generation, pure and immovable," and *De Mysteriis* VIII.4 256,8-15 Des Places: "We think it is necessary to address the gods in a language related to them.... These who first learned the names of the gods, connecting them with their own proper tongue, handed them down to us, that we might always preserve inviolate, (in a language) peculiar and proper to these (names). the sacred law of tradition." To this one might add *Corpus Hermeticum* XVI.2 (Asclepius to King Ammon): "Expressed in our own native (Egyptian) tongue, the discourse keeps clear the meaning of the words, for its very quality of sound, the very intonation of the Egyptian names, have in themselves the actuality of what is said. So as far as you can, O King—and you can do all things—keep this our discourse from translation, in order that such mighty mysteries may not come to the Greeks, and the disdainful speech of Greece with all its looseness and its surface beauty, so to speak, take all the strength out of the solemn and the strong—the energetic speech of Names. The Greeks, O King, have novel words, effecting demonstration only; and thus is the philosophizing of the Greeks—the noise of words. But we do not use words; we rather use sounds filled full with deeds."

20. VII 127,11-21, trans. B. LAYTON, *The Gnostic Scriptures. A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 158.

C. Alphabetical, Numerical and Graphic Symbolism for the Soul in *Marsanes*

Other than the "*de anima*" sections of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 25,16-27,30) and *Zostrianos* (VIII 42,10-44,22 and 27,19-28,30) on the destiny of souls, *Marsanes* contains the most extensive treatment of the soul, not only in Sethian literature, but also in most Gnostic literature as a whole. No reader of *Marsanes* can fail to wonder about the intention of the long section on the nomenclature of the cosmic powers and of the soul (X 8,14b-39,17) and the nature of the reception and implementation expected of its original audience. In particular, it is not clear whether the various strings of Greek alphabetic characters were cited by the author as graphical illustrations of his phonological discussion or as formulas to be enacted in ritual speech, perhaps as syllables of power, or some combination of both. The theory underlying their use and significance is expounded in the surviving portions of *Marsanes* (X 25,21b-39,17).

The heavily damaged section on the configurations and powers of the Zodiacal signs in X 21,1-25,21 that precedes the elaborate treatment of the alphabet and the configurations of the soul in X 25,21b-39,17 suggests that various combinations of the letters of the Greek alphabet symbolize the nature and condition of both the human and cosmic soul (the "celestial soul [that sur]rounds [the cosmos]," X 21,23-24), and are somehow related to the phonology of the names and the visual shapes (animal-like, polymorphic, mono- and bi-formed) of the signs of the Zodiac, whose "powers" are the angels.[21] The nature of these relations is never made clear, not only because of the exceptionally damaged condition of the introductory discussion, but also because the author has apparently discussed these matters elsewhere (X 25,15-20) and presupposes his readers' familiarity with them. Nevertheless, careful study of astral phenomena, their shapes and numerical relationships, reveals the

21. See Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* I.21 65,4-12 Des Places: "By means of them (rituals), unutterable things are expressed through ineffable symbols" and III.9 118,16-119,4 Des Places: "Sounds and melodies are appropriately consecrated to each of the gods, and kinship with them is fittingly rendered according to the appropriate ranks and powers of each, the motions of the universe itself, and the harmonious sounds whirring from these motions." See discussion in PEARSON, "Theurgic Tendencies," *op. cit.*, n. 19.

essential connection or sympathy (συμπάθεια) between heavenly and earthly phenomena:

> **X 42** [1] whether he observes the [2] two (sun and moon) or observes [3] the seven planets [4] or the twelve [5] signs of the Zodiac or [6] the thirty [-six] Decans [7] [...] [8] [...] [9] [...] [10] [...] [11] [... which] [12] are [the twelve zones (i.e., τὰ δωδεκατημόρια, i.e., 12 signs of 30 degrees each)] [13] [that total] [14] [three hundred-sixty] [15] degrees (i.e., αἱ μονομοιρίαι), [to] the [16] [places] in [association] with [17] [these] numbers (i.e., degrees traversed), whether [those in heaven] [18] or those upon the earth, [19] and those that are under the [earth,] [20] according to the sympathies and [21] the divisions (allotments?) deriving from [22] these and from the remaining [23] [three hundred sixty] degrees [24] [according to kind and] according to [25] [species].

Evidently, both the soul and the Zodiacal signs possess a certain shape or configuration (σχῆμα) that can be symbolized by the elemental phonetic and graphic constituents (στοιχεῖα—a term that also designates the letters—γράμματα) of the alphabet. These symbols can be distinguished by such things as the presence of aspirated (rough) or non-aspirated (smooth) pronunciation, in much the same way as the voices of animals (and thus the theriomorphic signs of the Zodiac) can be classified as either rough or smooth.

> **X 22** [20] [It is necessary that] [21] all the forms [become] [22] configurations, so that [a form may] [23] be assigned to [the elements (cf. letters)] [24] themselves [including the] [15] [smooth (cf. inaspirates)] and the [rough (cf. aspirates), like] [26] [*the voices*] of animals

Just as the ancients speculated on the four elements (στοιχεῖα)—fire, air, water, and earth—as the fundamental building blocks of physical reality, so also they speculated on the twenty-four letters (στοιχεῖα, γράμματα) as the fundamental building blocks of the symbolic and linguistic representation of reality, especially that of the astral realities, such as the soul and the stars and planets, that seemed to govern motion and change in the everyday world.

> From the parts of the night and day they (the ancients) substitute the (letters) for the order of the elements, by likening the power of the letters/elements to the lunar circuit, both illumining things and being illumined by them, and being a configuration of the moon's circuit when it waxes or wanes by its proper powers; a full moon is imitated by the nature of vowels, the half-moon by the semi-consonants, and the crescent moon by the waning of sound in the mutes. (*Scholia londinensia in Dionysii*

Thracis Artem Grammaticam, ed. A. Hilgard in *Grammatici Graeci* I.3.491,18-25)

Expressed slightly differently, in terms of all twenty-four letters:

> As in the heavens the seven planets have the authority for governing what appears and not deviating from the signs of the zodiac, but remaining and revolving about them govern what appears, so also the vowels, having acquired authority over literate speech by being shaped by and combined with the consonants, do not overstep the patterns of the 24 letters, but, always cycling through them, complete the entire selfsame literate speech, offering for this nothing else than sounds or letters, as neither night nor day needs anything for its cycle other than the 24 hours, but through these makes its circuit and the windings of its proper orbit. And so too the letters somehow attain completion and numerical definition. (*Scholia londinensia* in *Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam*, ed. A. Hilgard in *Grammatici Graeci* I.3.491,30-492,8)

In *Marsanes*, this symbolic power of the letters applies not only to the powers of the Zodiacal signs, but also to various "configurations" (σχήματα) of the soul. The somewhat better-preserved section on the alphabet and its relation to the configurations or shapes of the soul seems to reflect portions of Plato's discussion of the structure of the world soul and the incarnation of soul into body in *Timaeus* 35A-44D. Of particular importance seem to be three fundamental ("first," "second," "third") and two minor ("fourth," and "fifth") configurations of the soul in relation to various components of the alphabet: the seven "simple" vowels [αεηιουω] and their combination into diphthongs; the seventeen consonants and their various subcategories (the semivowels—liquids [λμνρσ] plus double consonants [ζξψ]—and the mutes—aspirate [θφχ], inaspirate [κπτ] and "intermediate" [βγδ]); and the combination of all of them into syllables.

Apparently, the vowels and diphthongs symbolize the three highest conditions of the soul—cosmic as well as individual—apart from somatic embodiment, while the syllabic combinations of the consonants—perhaps symbolizing corporeality—with the vowels seem to symbolize the "fourth" and "fifth" configurations of the soul, perhaps as an embodied entity. Just as the vowels are "influenced" by consonants, so also are souls influenced by the body, just as both souls and bodies are influenced by the "angelic" powers of the seven planets and the stellar powers of the dominant Zodiacal signs. But since the powers of these astral objects are also regarded as somehow present in the fundamental "elements" of reality in much the same way as the soul is present in the body, knowledge of how their symbolic counterparts—the letters (as στοιχεῖα)—combine and mutually influence one another at the levels of syllable and word apparently gives the knower some measure of control over the apparently external powers of the Zodiac, stars, and planets, and the gods and angels embodied in them.

In addition to these five "configurations" of the soul, the author also seems to think in terms of two "nomenclatures" (ὀνομασία): one for the "gods and angels" (X 27,13-14; cf. 30,3-9) that has to do with natural phonological combinations, and an "ignorant" nomenclature (X 30,28b-31,4) which apparently has to do with certain unnatural combinations of the seven vowels and seventeen consonants.

The author of *Marsanes* demands a certain mastery in knowing and utilizing these "nomenclatures" as well as the properties of the numbers and alphabetic characters that symbolize astral phenomena and their sympathetic relations and apportionments to all three realms of the cosmos, the heavens, the earth, and the underworld. Such mastery is not for the purpose of pure speculation or entertainment, but the acquisition of the kind of personal power that leads to salvation:

> **X 39** [18] For these reasons we have acquired [19] sufficiency; for it is fitting that [20] each one acquire [21] power for himself that he may bear fruit, [22] and that we [23] never heap [24] scorn [on] the mysteries [25] [...] the [...] [26] For [...] which [is ...] [27] [...] soul [...] [28] [... the] signs of the Zodiac [...] [29] [...] [30] [...] **40** [1] a new hypostasis. [2] And the reward which will [3] be provided for such a one [4] is salvation. [5] But the opposite will [6] happen there to the one [7] who commits sin.

> **X 42** [1] whether he observes the [2] two (sun and moon) or observes [3] the seven planets [4] or the twelve [5] signs of the Zodiac or [6] the thirty [-six] Decans [7] [...] [8] [...] [9] [...] [10] [...] [11] [... which] [12] are [the twelve zones (i.e., δωδεκατημορίαι, i.e., 12 signs of 30 degrees each)] [13] [that total] [14] [three hundred-sixty] [15] degrees (i.e., μονοιμορίαι), [to] the [16] [places] in [association] with [17] [these] numbers (i.e., degrees traversed), whether [those in heaven] [18] or those upon the earth, [19] and those that are under the [earth,] [20] according to the sympathies and [21] the divisions (allotments?) deriving from [22] these and from the remaining [23] [three hundred sixty] degrees [24] [according to kind and] according to [25] [species].

D. The Five Configurations or Shapes of the Soul in *Marsanes*

To facilitate discussion, I reproduce the text in a somewhat more systematic order than that employed by the author of *Marsanes*, treating first vowels, then consonants, consonant and vowel combinations, diacritics, words and discourse, and finally arithmology in that order.[22]

Simple Vowels – the First Configuration of the Soul

X 25 [22] However, the soul [22] too [has] [23] its configuration (aspects?) although it is diverse. [24] It is [in] [25] [its] form [26] that the configuration of the only-begotten soul [27] resides. Its configuration [28] is [the second] **26** [1] spherical part: εηιου, [2] while the first (part) goes around [it], [3] i.e., the self-begotten soul— [4] αεηιουω.

Duplicated Vowels (Diphthongs) – the Second Configuration of the Soul

26 [5] [The] second configuration— [6] εηιου—derives from those [having] [7] two sounds (diphthongs). The first [8] that is appended to them is [the] [9] [upsilon], and [the iota is its] [10] [companion. And these are the ones] [11] [you know] in [the radiance] [12] of the light.

28 [5] The diphthongs were [6] as follows: αι, αυ, [7] [ε]ι, ευ, ηυ, ου, ωυ, οι, ηι, [8] [υ]ι, ωι, αυει, ευηυ, οιου, [9] [γγ]γ, γγγ, γγγ, αιαυ, [10] [ειευ], ηυ, οιου, ωυ, γγγ, [11] [γγγ], αυειευ, οιου, ηυ [12] three times for a male soul. [13] (The third [14] configuration is spherical;) [15] the second configuration, [16] since it goes around it, has [17] two sounds (is a diphthong).

Triplicated simple vowels – the Third (Male) Configuration of the Soul

27 [26] [The] [27] third [configuration of the soul] [28] is [a sphere and] **28** [1] it is a spherical one (the second) that goes around [2] it. By virtue of the [3] simple vowels [4] <ααα,> εεε, <ηηη,> ιιι, ooo, υυυ, ωωω [5] the diphthongs were [6] as follows: αι, αυ, [7] [ε]ι, ευ, ηυ, ου, ωυ, οι, ηι, [8] [u]ι, ωι. αυει, ευηυ, οιου, [9] [γγ]γ, γγγ, γγγ, αιαυ, [10] [ειευ], ηυ, οιου, ωυ, γγγ, [11] [γγγ], αυειευ, οιου, ηυ— [12] three times for a male soul. [13] The third [14] configuration is spherical; [15] the second configuration, [16] since it goes around it, has [17] two sounds.

The male soul's [18] third configuration [19] (consists) of the [20] simple vowels: [21] ααα, εεε, ηηη, ιιι, ooo, [22] υυυ, ωωω, ωωω, ωωω. [23] [And] this configuration is distinct [24] [from] the first, but [25] [they resemble] each other [26] [and they] make some [27] [easy sounds] of [28] [this sort: αεη]οω. And **29** [1] from these (are made) the diphthongs (i.e., by suffixing ι υ).

22. See my "Introduction" in W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, and J. D. Turner, *Marsanès (NH X, 1)*, Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 25; (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval; Leuven-Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2001), 57-75.

Vowel Combinations – the Fourth and Fifth Configurations of the Soul

29 [2] So also the [3] fourth and the fifth (configurations): [4] with regard to them, not everything was allowed to be [5] revealed, [6] but only those things that are obvious. [7] You (pl.) were taught [8] about them, that you should contemplate them [9] in order that they, too, might [10] seek and find [what] [11] they all are, either [12] through themselves alone [13] or through one another, [14] or to reveal [limits] [15] set from the beginning, [16] either alone [or] [17] in relation to one another. Just as [they (the letters)] [18] exist with each other [in] [19] sound, whether individually [20] or by similarity, [they are] [21] prepended, [they] [22] are appended. Either their [23] [part] is derivative and [24] similar, whether by means of [the] [25] [long] (vowels ηω) or [by means of] [26] those of [dual time value (αιυ), or] [27] by means of [the short (vowels εο)] [28] which are short [...] [29] [...] **30** [1] or the oxytones (or: long vowels) or the [2] intermediate tones (i.e., περισπώμενα) or the barytones (or: short vowels).

The first three configurations (σχῆμα) of the soul are all defined in terms of the vowels, and are generally "spherical" in nature, apparently forming three concentric spheres or orbits, the outer of which is the "first" configuration and the inner the "third." While these three "reveal" the invisible realm ("the whole place," perhaps the aeonic realm), and thus may delineate the realm of disincarnate souls (perhaps including the world soul itself), the fourth and fifth configurations, which would be located inside the first three, are capable of manifesting visible things, perhaps the visible realms of the fixed stars (including the Zodiacal belt), the planets, and earthly phenomena as well.

The first configuration of the soul has two "parts" (μέρος in X 26,1), an "only-begotten" and a "self-begotten" part; these terms suggest a very special kind of soul, perhaps the cosmic soul itself. In contrast to the pairs of vowels (diphthongs) symbolizing the second configuration of the soul, and the trios of vowels symbolizing the third configuration of the "male" soul, the representation of the first configuration by the sequence of single ("simple," ἁπλοῦς) non-repeated vowels (αεηιουω) as well as by its unique (μονογενής) and self-generated nature suggests a "simple" and unitary nature, perhaps a monad that—in Pythagorean terms—is neither even nor odd, neither female nor male, but androgynous. The second configuration of the soul seems "derived" from the diphthongs (X 28,15-17), each of which is a dyad that in Pythagorean tradition is associated with a "female" nature. The third configuration of

the soul is spherical; like the first, it is symbolized by simple vowels, but apparently in a repeated pattern of triplets (X 28,21 ααα, εεε, ηηη, ιιι, ooo, υυυ, ωωω, ωωω, ωωω), thereby emphasizing its triple, or in Pythagorean terms, its "male" character, since "three" is the first odd and "male" number. Thus the first configuration is "simple," unitary and androgynous, the second is dyadic and female, and the third is triadic and male.

The fourth and fifth configurations of the soul, though not individually assigned any pattern of letters, seem to refer to perceptible manifestations of the soul (e.g., of stars, planets and humans), which are nevertheless worthy of contemplation. They are apparently also symbolized by vowels—long (ηω), short (εο), and intermediate (αιυ, either long or short)—either alone or in certain combinations that can be accented (oxytone, barytone, and intermediate).

The five configurations involving vowels alone might be summarized as follows:

> first outer (spherical?) configuration = αεηιουω = only-begotten soul — unitary, androgynous
>
> second spherical configuration = εηιου "from diphthongs" = self-begotten soul — dyadic, feminine
>
> third spherical configuration = <ααα>, εεε, <ηηη>, ιιι, ooo, υυυ, ωωω — triadic, male
>
> fourth (spherical?) configuration = combinations of vowels = visible, perceptible
>
> fifth (spherical?) configuration = combinations of vowels = visible, perceptible

E. Consonants—Symbolizing Embodiment?

While the vowels symbolize various configurations of the soul, the text goes on to discuss also the seventeen consonants and their combination with the vowels. In this way the psychic power of the vowels becomes embodied. It is apparently at this point that "naming" becomes possible, particularly in the form of a certain natural "nomenclature" (ὀνομασία) that is appropriate for naming the gods and angels, but also in certain unnatural combinations that produce an "ignorant" nomenclature.

> **X 26** [27] The sounds of [28] [the semivowels (ζξψλμνρσ)] are **27** [1] superior to the voiceless (consonants βγδκπτθφχ). [2] And those that are double (ζξψ) are superior [3] to the semivowels which [4] do not change (the liquids λμνρ). And the aspirates (θφχ) [5] are better than the inaspirates (κπτ) <of> [6] the voiceless (consonants). [7] And as for those that are intermediate (βγδ), [8] their combinations are many. [9] They are ignorant [of] [10] the good ones (i.e., the double consonants) and are [11] combined with the worse ones (i.e., the liquids) in [the middle]. [12] [As] in the case [13] of the nomenclature for the [gods] [14] and the angels, it is [not that] [15] they (the consonants) are combined with each other [16] indiscriminately, but [17] only that they have [18] a beneficial effect. [19] It just didn't happen [20] that their intention (or: pronunciation) was apparent.

Vowels, which have sound of themselves and are therefore superior to the consonants nevertheless require consonants for the completion of speech:

> If therefore the vowels are able to accomplish a sound of themselves, and for this purpose have no need of the order of the consonants, why were the consonants invented? We say that, as the soul can survive without the body and likewise needs the body for accomplishing the survival of living creatures, just so too the vowels, even if they can be apprehended apart, have need of combination with the consonants to accomplish grammatical speech. (Heliodorus in *Scholia londinensia in Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam*, ed. A. Hilgard, *Grammatici Graeci* I.3.501,7-14; cf. I.3.500,29-30; III.500,29-30 and *Scholia Vaticana*, *ibid.*, I.3.198,15-22; cf. also Proclus, *In rem publicam* 2, 65.12-66,1).[23]

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23. Proclus, *In rem publicam* 2, 65.12-66,1: "For the (elements) of the zodiac will be analogous to bodies, and those of the planets to souls, for the latter are vowels, while the (elements) of the zodiacal signs are consonants. A body cannot live without a soul nor a soul without a body, for just as the consonants are not disposed to be pronounced without the vowels, neither are the vowels without the consonants. Of what sort of things are fitting for which of the signs of the zodiac or of the planets we spoke in other places, and how the seven vowels are distributed among the seven planets and the seventeen consonants among the twelve signs of the zodiac. So among the combinations one must begin from the vowels and must set them amid the consonants and must end with them—among the consonants, as in the case of nine month (pregnancies), where [in the Pythagorean σπόριμον τρίγονον, a 3-4-5 right triangle] one must place first the horizontal (4) ones and then those of the hypotenuse (5), and as in the case of seven month (pregnancies), where one must place first the vertical (3) ones and then the horizontal (4) ones (for the horizontal leads in the revolution of the hypotenuse, and the vertical leads in the revolution of the horizontal, for the vertical is above the earth and the horizontal is carried up with it and, after both of these, the hypotenuse). And those among the beneficial must be aspirated in pronunciation, but those of the opposite must not be aspirated." Cf.

Marsanes seems to adopt this perspective in its valorization of the twenty-four Greek letters, that is, the vowels are superior to the consonants, among which the semivowels (ζξψλμνρσ) are superior to the mute consonants (βγδκπτθφχ).[24] However, one notes that the Valentinian Marcus "the Magician" proposed the reverse order of valorization; he reports the "decree of the Tetrad" concerning the highest divine principles:

> Understand the twenty-four letters that you have as symbolic emanations of the three powers that contain the entire number of elements on high. The nine mute consonants belong to the Father and Truth because they are voiceless, that is, inexpressible and unutterable. The eight semivowels belong to Logos and Life, since they occupy as it were the intermediate position between the unvoiced and the voiced, and they receive the effusion of those above them and elevate those beneath them. The vowels, seven in number, belong to Man and Church, since a voice went forth from Man and formed all things, for the echo of the voice gave them form. (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* I.14,5)

According to *Marsanes* (X 26,27-27,20), as in the case of the nomenclature for the gods and angels, the intention (or perhaps the "pronunciation")[25] of apparently indiscriminate consonantal combinations may not be evident; all that matters is that they work, that their effect (ἐργασία) is beneficial.[26] That these nomenclatures also have to do with syllable-formation is suggested by the following section:

> **X 30** [3] And (sometimes) <the> consonants [4] exist with the vowels, [5] and by turns [6] they are prepended [7] and appended. [8] They constitute a nomenclature [9] [for] the angels. And (sometimes) [10] [the] consonants are [11] independent, [12] [and] diverse— [13] they (text: "it") prefix and they ("it") suffix [14] the hidden [15] gods. By means of [16] beat and [17] pitch and [18] silence and attack [19] [they] summon the semivowels, [20] all of which [21] are subjected to a [22] single [sound]. Just as it is only [23] the [unchanging (λμνρ)] <and> the double (consonants ζξψ) [24] that exist among the semivowels (ζξψλμνρσ), [25] the aspirates (θφχ) [26] [and the inaspirates (κπτ)] and the [27] [intermediates (βγδ)] constitute [28] [the voiceless (consonants βγδκπτθφχ).
>
> Contrary to] [29] [nature they (the consonants and vowels)] are combined [30] [with one another, and] they are separate **31** [1] from one another. They are [2] prepended and appended, [3] and they constitute an [4] ignorant nomenclature. [5] And they (the vowels) become one or [6] two or three or [four] [7] or five or six up to [8] seven having a [9] [simple] sound. These that [have] [10] two [sounds (diphthongs)] are grouped with [the] [11] [seventeen consonants.
>
> Among] [12] the previously named [some] are [13] deficient and [14] they are as if [they] had no substance, [15] or as if [they] were an image [of] [16] being, [or] as if they separate [17] the nature [that is] good [from the one] [18] that [is] evil in the [middle.] [19]
>
> And you (sg.) [will introduce] [20] into those (patterns) that resemble each other [21] the vowels [together with] [22] the consonants. Some [23] are: βαγαδ[α]ζαθα, [24] βεγεδ[ε]ζεθε, [βηγηδη] [25] ζηθη, [βιγιδιζιθι, βογο] [26] δοζοθο, [βυγυδυζυθυ], [27] βωγωδω[ζωθω, and] [28] the rest. [And some are]: [29] βα[βεβηβιβοβυβω]. **32** [1] But the rest are [2] different: αβεβηβι [3] [β]οβ, in order that you (sg.) might [assemble] [4] them and become separate from the [5] angels.

A. BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1899), 373-383. Philo compares vowels to the mind, semivowels to the senses, and the mute consonants to the vowels: *QG* IV.117; cf. *De congressu* 1.50 and *Opif.* 126.

24. In late antique grammatical studies, certain classes of consonants were regarded as better or worse than others. Thus, according to Melampous' commentary on Dionysius Thrax, *Ars Grammatica* (ed. A. Hilgard in *Grammatici Graeci* I.3.42,6-16), among the consonants, the semivowels (ἡμίφωνα = ζξψλμνρσ) are, unlike the mutes (ἄφωνα = βγδκπτθφχ), possessed of sound—although only "half-baked" (ἥμισυ φωνῆς)—and are thus "worse" (ἐλάττονα) than the vowels (φωνήεντα), which have "perfect voice" (τελεία φωνή). Since they undergo alteration (μεταβολή) in the conjugation of verbs (μέλλησις τῶν ῥημάτων) and the declension of nouns (κλίσις τῶν ὀνομάτων), *Marsanes* regards the semivowels as superior to the mute consonants, which do not undergo such alteration (ἀμετάβολαι), that is, as changeless entities they must be deprived of "soul." Among the semivowels, the "long" (μακρά) or "double" (διπλᾶ) consonants (ζξψ) are superior to the "short" (βραχέα, βραχύ) mutes (the liquids λμνρ and σ), which "sound worse" (μᾶλλον κακόφωνα, *Scholia londinensia in Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam*, ed. Hilgard in *Grammatici Graeci* I.3.201,22). Among the mutes, the aspirates (δασέα = θφχ), produced only by the expulsion of much breath (i.e., "spirit"), are superior—probably in the sense of more spiritual and vital—to the inaspirates (ψιλά = κπτ), which are produced only in the trachea, and are thus in turn superior to the "intermediates" (μέσα = βγδ), whose combinations are "many."

25. Reading ⲡⲟⲩⲱϣ(ⲉ), "utterance" for MS ⲡⲟⲩⲱϣⲉ, "will, intention," X 27,20.

26. For the nature of these "nomenclatures" (ὀνομασίαι) or "namings" whose pronunciation was able to effect the ascent of the soul to the level of and beyond the gods and angels named by them, see *Papyri Graecae Magicae* XIII 206-212, 566 [Preisendanz], and on their apparent inarticulateness, also IV 605-617; for further discussion, see P.-H. POIRIER, "Commentaire," in W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, and J. D. Turner, *Marsanès (NH X, 1)*. Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 25; (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval; Leuven-Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2000), *ad. loc.*

One gathers that certain syllables composed of consonants and vowels constitute "a nomenclature [for] the angels" (X 30,3-15), while others constitute an "ignorant nomenclature" (X 31,3) created by certain combinations regarded as "contrary to nature" (παρὰ φύσιν). While consonants in combination with vowels constitute a nomenclature for the "angels," the consonants occurring by themselves have to do with these hidden "gods" (X 30,14; cf. "the nomenclature for the [gods] and the angels" in X 27,13-14). The identity of these "hidden gods" remains obscure; perhaps this term refers to something like sound and silence, or the utterance of *voces mysticae*, or even the vowels themselves (which have "sound") insofar as they are "hidden" between syllables and words and are the natural bearers of meter and pitch; in any case these "gods" seem to be the "single [sound]" (X 30,22) to which the semi-consonants are subjected in speech. Besides natural phonological combinations that produce a nomenclature fit for the angels, there are also unnatural combinations that produce an "ignorant" nomenclature (X 30,28b-31,4), perhaps because they form no actual words. Evidently, even though deficient, assembling such patterns assists one in becoming separate from the angels, perhaps by empowering the soul to ascend to the realms beyond them. One may indeed wonder whether the consonant-vowel combinations, both natural and unnatural, and apparently representing states of the soul in combination with the body, may have to do with the "fourth" and "fifth" configurations of the soul mentioned in X 29,1-7 as able to reveal only visible things. But the text does not at all make this explicit.

At this point, the text appears to move from the basic building blocks of speech (vowels, consonants, syllables) to the level of articulated speech. One might expect that the exposition would begin with the next higher level of articulation level after syllables—namely words—but, oddly enough, the exposition begins first with the punctuation that separates phrases already consisting of words, and only subsequently treats words:

> **X 33** [16] [...] [17] promise that [the articulation marks (διαίρεσις) will] [18] begin [to separate] [19] them by means of [20] a sign [and] [21] a point, the [uninflected (upright = ·) one] [22] and the [inflected (bent = ,)] one. [23] So also [are the images] [24] of being: [25] [they derive from a *joining*] [26] of the letters (elements) [27] in [a holy *union*] **34** [1] according to a [juxtaposition] [2] where they exist independently. [3] [And] <they> exist with each [4] [other] by generation or [by] [5] [kinship. And] according to [their own] [6] [generation] they do not have ...

Here, the terms σημεῖον (ⲘⲀⲈⲒⲚ) and στίγμα, both of which can mean "point" or "mark," seem to refer respectively to an upright colon (·) that separates longer clauses from one another and a curved comma (,) that separates shorter phrases from one another. The author then applies such division or "diaeresis" of speech to the analysis of the kinds (ⲈⲒⲚⲈ = τὰ εἴδη) of being (οὐσία), which he considers to have derived from a joining or union in which these kinds exist independently yet are related by genus (Coptic ϫⲡⲟ ordinarily renders Greek γένεσις, which seems here mistaken for γένος, "genus," "kind") and "[kinship]." In X 33,16-34,6, it seems that *Marsanes* understands the divisions or διαιρέσεις of speech represented by punctuation to symbolize the "method of division and synthesis" applied by Plato to the study of true reality, which he calls "dialectic." In *Phaedrus* 265D3-266C1, Plato distinguishes two kinds of dialectic, an ascending or "synoptic" (*Republic* VII 537C) dialectic that moves (by recollection) from idea to idea to the supreme idea, and a descending, "diairetic" dialectic that moves from the highest idea and by division distinguishes within the general ideas particular ideas until one reaches ideas that do not include in themselves further ideas. One thus moves from multiplicity to unity and from unity to its expressed multiplicity.

Having introduced the method of division and synthesis of being, *Marsanes* moves to a consideration of words and discourse, in particular philosophical discourse on the "hypostases" of being:

> **X 35** [20] But there exists gentle [discourse] [21] and there exists another [22] discourse [related to] [23] [permanent] substance [24] of this [sort that speaks] [25] of [that which is invisible], [26] and it [manifests] [27] the difference [between the Same] [28] and the [Different and] **36** [1] between the whole and a [part] [2] of an [indivisible] substance. [3] And [that] power [4] has [a] [5] share in [the joy]— [6] in (both) discord and [harmony—] [7] [of their honor], whether [8] [...] [9] [...] [10] [...] [11] [...] [12] [...] [13] [...] [14] [...] [15] [... it is] possible [16] [to know that the things that] exist [17] everywhere [are honored] [18] always, [19] [since they] dwell with (both) the corporeal [20] and the incorporeal ones. [21] This is the discourse on the hypostases [22] that one should [23] [utter] in this way. If [24] [they do] not [speak] with one another, [25] [how then] does it (the discourse) help [26] [those who] are troubled [with] [27] [it (the discourse) about that which is] visible? [28] [Therefore] if one **37** [1] knows it, one will [2] [speak] it. [3]

But there are words, some [4] of which are [dual], [5] [and others] that exist [6] [separately (i.e., of singular number?), the ones that pertain] [7] to [substance (proper nouns?) ...] [8] [...] [9] [...] [10] [...] [11] [...] [12] [...] [13] [and] they [...] [14] ... [...] [15] or those which [...] [16] [... according to those that perdure] [17] or according to [those that] have [18] time (or: are of dual time = αιυ?). And [these] [19] either are separated [20] or they are joined with one another [21] or with themselves, either [the] [22] diphthongs, or the [23] simple [vowels], or every [...] [24] or [...] [25] or [...] [26] [exist] just as [...] [27] [exist] ... [...] [28] the [consonants ...] **38** [1] they exist individually [2] until they are divided [3] and joined.

Now some [4] are able [5] [to generate the consonants] [6] [letter] by [letter ...] [7] [... difference] [8] [...] [9] [...] [10] [...] [11] [...] [12] [...] become [13] [... being]... [14] [....] [15] [They (the letters) will count] once [16] [or twice], and thrice [17] [for the] vowels, [18] and twice [19] [for] the consonants, [20] [and] once for [21] the entire ensemble, and with [22] uncertainty for [23] [those that] are subject to change (in conjugation and declension) [24] [as well as those that] originated [25] [from them] and [everything] [26] thereafter. And [27] they are all [*the* names] [28] [at once. They] were **39** [1] hidden, but they were pronounced [2] openly. They did not [3] stop being revealed, [4] nor did they stop [5] naming the angels. [6] The vowels [7] [are joined with] the [8] [consonants, whether] externally [9] [or] internally, [10] by means of [...] they [11] said [...] [12] [teach you ...] [13] again [in this way they were counted] [14] four times, (and) they were [engendered] [15] three [16] times, and they became [17] [twelvefold].

The extended discussion on words in X 35,20-39,17 begins with comment, not on individual words, but on types of discourse, distinguishing between ordinary "soothing" or "pleasant" discourse concerning merely sensible phenomena and a (philosophical) discourse that uses speech about visible things to treat the realm of permanent being (οὐσία) by distinguishing between the Same and the Different and between a part and the whole of an indivisible substance.[27] This distinction seems to rest on Plato's (*Timaeus* 37BC) distinction between two types of discourse within the cosmic soul (and human souls too—*Timaeus* 44A), one concerning sensible phenomena (governed by the circle of the Different) that produces true opinions (δόξαι καὶ πίσται), and another that concerns what is rational (governed by the circle of the Same) that produces intellect and understanding (νοῦς ἐπιστήμη τε). According to the *Sophist* 252E-254B, it requires an expert in grammar (τεχνῆς τῆς γραμματικῆς) to distinguish between letters that combine and those that do not (the vowels acting as the only "bond," δεσμός, that can link the letters together). Similarly it requires a philosopher and expert in dialectic (διαλεκτικῆς ἐπιστήμης), to make a distinction (διαίρεσις) between one form (ἰδέα) and another and to know how things can or cannot associate (κοινωνεῖν) by being able to divide them according to kind (γένος). Just so, according to *Timaeus* 44A, at infancy the motions of the soul-circles in human beings are perturbed by the influx of nourishment and sense-impressions and can only say of the categories of the Same and the Different that such-and-such a thing is "the same as this" or "different than that," but as maturity sets in, the revolutions become more orderly, and one becomes increasingly rational, and is increasingly able to give the right names to what is different and what is the same.

27. Cf. Macrobius' distinction between entertaining *fabulae*, *narratio fabulosa* on invisible psychic and daemonic reality, and discourse on first principles (*Comm. in Somnium Scipionis* II.6-14).

In addition to gender and case, words have number (singular, dual, and plural), some are substantives (proper nouns), some words—or perhaps letters—refer to things that perdure and others to things in the realm of time (i.e., becoming, or perhaps are composed of "dichronic" vowels that can be either long or short). The text seems to refer to techniques of manipulating the consonants and vowels in sequences of varying length; in spite of a certain obscurity, it is clear that their purpose is to name—and thus reveal—the hidden angels by being uttered aloud, perhaps those angels and powers associated with the twelve ("[counted] four times, [engendered] three times") signs of the Zodiac.

The theurgical intent of this alphabetic speculation is nicely summed up by Nicomachus of Gerasa, who makes clear the relation between the elements of the alphabet (letters, vowels and consonants), the elements of number and geometrical shape, and both musical and spoken sounds:[28]

For indeed the sounds of each sphere of the seven, each sphere naturally producing one certain kind of sound, are called "vowels." They are

28. Nicomachus in C. JAN(US), ed., *Musici Scriptores Graeci* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1962), 276-277, translated and cited by PEARSON, "Gnosticism as Platonism," in *IDEM*, *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 161, referring also to the treatment of theurgy in E. R. DODDS, "New Light on the Chaldaean Oracles," in H. LEWY, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Recherches d'archéologie et de philosophe et d'histoire 13; Cairo: 1956; new edition, M. Tardieu; Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1978), 700, n. 31.

ineffable in and of themselves, but are recalled by the wise with respect to everything made up of them. Wherefore also here (i.e., on earth) this sound has power, which in arithmetic is a monad, in geometry a point, in grammar a letter (of the alphabet). And combined with the material letters, which are the consonants, as the soul is to the body and the musical scale is to the strings—the one producing living beings, the other pitch and melody—they accomplish active and mystic powers of divine beings. Wherefore when especially the theurgists are worshipping such (a divine being), they invoke it symbolically with hissing sounds and clucking, with inarticulate and foreign sounds. (Nicomachus, *Musici Scriptores Graeci*, 276-277)

F. Numbers and their Properties

The final instance of theurgical lore in *Marsanes* seems to be the following brief summary on the properties of the numbers, which of course were represented by the letters of the alphabet, but according to Pythagorean tradition were regarded as possessing properties often derived from the patterns made by certain numbers of discrete units (sometimes represented by a physical arrangement of pebbles), such that numbers could be square, oblong, and so on, the most well-known pattern being that of the Tetraktys (1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10).[29] While the preceding treatment of vowels, consonants, syllables, diacritics, words, and discourse have a clear application to verbal and thus possibly ritual performance for certain theurgical purposes, the intent of the following treatment of numbers is less clear. That they are intended to fall into a category similar to the preceding alphabetic speculation is suggested by the claim that, like the vowels comprising the three configurations of the soul, even the shapeless Dyad also has a "configuration" (σχῆμα).

X 32 [5] And there [6] will be some effects. [7] A good point of departure [8] is from [9] [the] Triad, [and] it [extends] [10] [to that (the Dyad) which] has need of the [Unity] [11] [that] confined [12] [it in] a shape (the Triad). <The> Dyad [13] and the Monad [14] do not resemble anything; rather [15] they are principles. [16] The Dyad [constitutes] [17] a division [from the] Monad, [and] [18] [it] belongs to the hypostasis. [19] But the Tetrad received (the) [elements] [20] and the Pentad [21] received concord, and the [22] [Hexad] was perfected by [23] itself. The [24] [Hebdomad] received beauty, [25] [and the] Ogdoad [26] [attuned its constituents] [27] [to harmony], [28] [and the Ennead is] [29] [honored much more]. **33** [1] And the [Decad revealed] [2] the entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm). [3] But

29. See Photius' arithmological excerpt from Nicomachus cited in Chapter 9, p. 376.

the Hendecad and the [4] [Dodecad] have passed over [5] [into the boundless], [6] [and] it [is higher than] the [7] Hebdomad [which is] [8] [bounded. ...].

The "first thing" which "is good" is a feminine entity; it might refer to the first "female" number, the Dyad or, more likely, simply to the "starting point" of the author's exposition. This exposition unexpectedly begins with the Triad instead of the Monad, perhaps because the author has been discussing the shapes of the soul, and therefore wishes to begin the exposition with the first entity that has shape—the Triad—rather than with the primal entities that form the Triad, namely the Monad and Dyad (that themselves have no inherent shape, and thus do not "resemble" anything else).

Beginning with the Triad, the order of exposition moves to the inherently shapeless Dyad which acquires shape—in the form of the Triad—only when limited and confined by the Unity of the Monad.[30] Like Plato's "indefinite dyad" or "matter" (cf. <Iamblichus>, *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 7,3-10; 8,5-9,4; 12,9-16), the Dyad is a mere shapeless potentiality that is first actualized in the Triad, which is the first number to have a definite beginning, middle, and end (*Theol. arith.* 14,14-17; 17,15-18,3), the first instance of determinate being and thus of "shape." Therefore, to achieve determinacy and definition, the shapeless unlimited Dyad "has need" of Unity or the One which serves as a Limit (πέρας) to define it, and thereby produces the Triad. Subsequently, the author goes on to say that the Dyad originates by a "division [from the] Monad" (cf. Nicomachus *apud Theol. arith.* 5,4: μονὰς ... δυάδος γὰρ παρεκτικὴ διφορθεῖσα). The Dyad is also said to belong to "the hypostasis," although the *Theol. arith.* 10,8 characterizes that hypostasis as "material" (ὑλική) and "receptive of every kind of corruption" (φθορᾶς πάσης ἀναδεκτική); one wonders whether the author rather intended "belongs to the substrate" (ὑποκείμενον), i.e., matter (ὕλη), rather than "to the hypostasis (ὑπόστασις)."

The Tetrad receives the four elements (fire, air, water, earth; cf. *Theol. arith.* 23,19-22). According to Megillus, (*apud Theol. arith.* 34,21-35,5) the Pentad is called "lack of strife" (ἀνεικία) because it "combines everything that was formerly discordant" (τὴν πάντων προδιεστῶτων

30. Like *Marsanes*, Moderatus too began his account of ontogenesis, not with the supreme One, but with his second primal principle, the Unitary Logos, that gives rise to both the supreme One and to indefinite Quantity (the Dyad) by depriving itself of all unity (on Moderatus, see Chapter 9).

σύστασιν καὶ ἕνωσιν) and "brings together and reconciles (σύνοδον καὶ φίλωσιν) the two types of number," i.e., as sum of the first even/female (2) and first odd/male (3) numbers; for similar reasons, it is also called "justice" (δικαιοσύνη, 35,5-21) and "marriage" (γάμος 30,19). The Hexad is perfect or complete (τελεία) as the sum of its own factors (*Theol. arith.* 27,8-10). Although the Hexad is associated with beauty (καλλονή, e.g., *Theol. arith.* 44,5), on the basis of the theologian Linus' *To Hymenaeus*, Iamblichus claims that the Heptad controls (ἐπικρατεῖν) all things by enshrining "the nature of the primordial beauty that attracts everything to itself" (τῇ τοῦ ἀρχεγόνου καὶ πάντα ἕλκοντος ἐφ' ἑαυτὸ κάλλους φύσει, *Theol. arith.* 67,4-14). The claim that the "Ogdoad [attuned its constituents to harmony]" is confirmed by the *Theololo-goumena aritheticae* 73,5-8, according to which the Octad is "embracer of all harmonies" (παναρμόνιος), given that it is equal-times-equal-times-equal (ἰσάκις ἴση ἰσάκις, i.e., 2 × 2 × 2). The *Theologoumena arithmeticae* 76,6-7 agrees with *Marsanes* by proclaiming the Ennead to be the "greatest (μέγιστον) of numbers within the Decad." That the Decad "[revealed] the entire place (ⲡⲙⲁ ⲧⲏⲣⲟ = τὸ πᾶν)" owes to its character as itself symbolizing "the all," "the cosmos," "the heaven," etc., according to Pythagorean theology (*Theol. arith.* 80,1-81,3).

On the other hand, since they exceed the Decad, "the most perfect boundary of number" (ὅρον τὸν τελειότατον ἀριθμοῦ, *Theol. arith.* 80,7-8), the Hendecad and Dodecad pass over into the boundless (~ ἀπέραντος), which exceeds the Hebdomad that is "bounded" (as an "acropolis," the Hebdomad is, "like the indivisible monad, a strong fortification" [δυσχείρωτον ἔρυμα], since it is relatively prime to all the numbers contained in the Decad). Not only is the Dodecad greater than the Hebdomad in magnitude, but its astral counterpart, the Zodiacal sphere, is also "higher" than the seven planets. Even though the Hendecad and Dodecad fall outside the fundamental Decad (to whose treatment most arithmological treatises are restricted), one suspects that *Marsanes* includes them because twelve numbers are necessary to symbolize the "configurations" of the twelve signs of the Zodiac, to which the five "configurations" of the soul are apparently related.

G. Alphanumeric Speculation and Platonic Doctrines of the Soul

If one were to hazard a guess concerning the author's doctrine of the five configurations or shapes of the soul, one might suggest that the whole is an alphanumeric interpretation of the psychogonia of Plato's *Timaeus* 35A-44D discussed in Chapter 8. The first three configurations would represent the cosmic soul in terms either of its three basic ingredients—Being, Difference, and Sameness, which Proclus says give rise to the divine, demonic, and partial soul respectively (*In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* III.254,4-6)—or, more likely, in terms of the spherical or circular configurations into which the demiurge divided it (*Timaeus* 36C2): an outer spherical envelope signifying the motion that revolves invariantly in the same place (the sphere of the fixed stars), containing two inner circles, that of the same (the celestial equator defining the plane of this revolution), and the circle of the different (the ecliptic or Zodiacal belt within which the movements of the Sun and other planets is confined), which is subsequently subdivided into the individual orbits of the seven planets.

If so, then the fourth and fifth configurations would represent the "second and third" portions (*Timaeus* 41D5) remaining in the mixing bowl from which individual souls were made and sown into each star, thus becoming visible (not the souls themselves, but their "bodies," Plato, *Laws* X 898DE; Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, III.255,10-16) and "revealing" visible things (X 29,2-6). At this point, the younger gods are assigned the task of incarnating these souls into mortal bodies—which our author seems to symbolize by the consonants—crafted from the four elements (*Timaeus* 42E-44C). The shock of being incarnated into a foreign element causes such souls to undergo perturbations that result in the loss of their original innate capacity to perceive clear and distinct ideas and thus to distinguish between things and name them according to the appropriate nomenclature. Incarnation results in the initial loss of the soul's natural or innate "nomenclature" (the one for gods and angels) and its replacement by an unnatural (ignorant) "nomenclature." *Marsanes* here seems to refer to Plato's (*Timaeus* 37BC, 44A) description of the two states of the revolutions of the Same and Different experienced by souls upon their incarnation: the innately circular motions of such souls are at first confused by the unnatural rectilinear movements associated with bodily perception and nutritional processes and are capable only of "soothing" but ignorant discourse, yet when their motions are subsequently corrected and calmed by education and observance of the natural and regular motion of the heavens, they become capable of a rational discourse able to dis-

tinguish the Same from the Different and part from whole (X 35,20-36,2).

In this way, *Marsanes* tries to establish direct relationships between a number of factors: the various conditions of the soul and its relative knowledge and ignorance are connected with the ability to understand the appropriate combination of the letters of the alphabet, and to distinguish among the properties of numbers. The ability to classify the various configurations or states of the soul—both cosmic and individual, both disembodied and embodied—is related to the need for careful observation of the planets, stars and Zodiacal signs, characterized by qualities similar to those (shapes) of the soul and of the letters of the alphabet: human, bestial, or polymorphous in shape, voiced, semi-voiced, or voiceless, and so on.[31] The emphasis seems to fall equally on both knowledge and demonstration of that knowledge in practical performance; the entities and relationships symbolized by the letters must not only be known, but also enacted by being counted, combined in appropriate ways, and named or spoken.

While previous treatises like the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes* had concentrated on theology or the metaphysics of the highest principles and intelligible realities and the means of knowing these, *Marsanes*—even though it offers its own equally abstruse metaphysics—now offers a Sethian Gnostic physics and psychology based on astrology, theurgical technique, and a theory of language. Of all the Sethian treatises, *Marsanes* is most insistent that the perceptible realm of becoming and sensation is entirely worthy of preservation. Only the first twenty of *Marsanes*' 68 extant pages delve into the transcendental metaphysics and epistemology expounded in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* and presupposed in the *Three Steles of Seth*; the remainder seem for the most part dedicated to astral phenomena (the Zodiac, stars, planets and their powers), the configurations of the soul, the nomenclature for the gods and angels, and the judgment of souls.

To restrict one's knowledge of reality merely to transcendental realities is insufficient: transcendental forms also have perceptible configurations or shapes (X 22,20b-26), the distinctions among intelligible and divine astral realities also apply in the sensible, psychic and physical domain (X 25,17b-20). Although discursive thinking must be replaced

31. Φωνήεντα, ἡμίφωνα, ἄφωνα; cf. BOUCHÉ-LECLERCQ, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1899), 149-150.

by a direct and silent contemplative vision of intelligible reality and its ultimate first principles, that alone is not enough for full enlightenment. Since not only one's soul, but also this sensible world is worthy of being preserved in its entirety (X 5,22-26), a knowledge of its nature and constituents is also necessary, and for this the elements of ordinary language (letters and their combinations, syllables, words, and discursive discourse) offer themselves as a means for articulating this knowledge and applying it to the practical problem of dealing with the powers that influence and control that world.

Hence the need to supplement the rather exclusively otherworldly lore of other Sethian treatises with instruction on stellar and psychic phenomena and the appropriate nomenclature to "get a handle" on them. In this sense, *Marsanes* offers a specific—theurgical—theory of natural language according to which the linguistic articulation of human thinking and contemplation facilitates or enables, not merely human knowledge of both the perceptible and intelligible cosmos, but in fact the self-knowledge of the higher realities themselves. With regard to the "created gods" (of the stars, planets, and of mythology, cf. *Timaeus* 38C-41A) that comprise the "fourth and the fifth" configurations of the soul, Marsanes says:

> **X 29** [2] So also the [3] fourth and the fifth (configurations): [4] with regard to them, not everything was allowed to be [5] revealed, [6] but only those things that are obvious. [7] You (pl.) were taught [8] about them, that you should contemplate them [9] in order that they, too, might [10] seek and find [what] [11] they all are, either [12] through themselves alone [13] or through one another, [14] or to reveal [limits] [15] set from the beginning, [16] either alone [or] [17] in relation to one another.

Humans and their ability to articulate reality by linguistic means occupy a pivotal place in the scheme of things: human contemplation of the souls of the very stars themselves enables one to know their individual and mutual identity and the limitations set for them even before they were brought into being.

IV. Comparison of Platonic and Gnostic Views of the Soul

It seems clear that Jonas' attempt to associate figures such as Philo and Plotinus with a gnostic view of the cosmos and the situation of the soul within it has provoked a vigorous reaction, especially from scholars of

Platonism, concerning the similarities and differences between the two movements. Most authors seem anxious to separate Platonic thinkers from Gnosticism as much as possible, yet at many points they must and do admit certain similarities. Ultimately, the difference between the two bodies of thought comes down to a question of world rejection versus world affirmation, rejection versus acceptance of the body, or pessimism versus optimism. It seems to me that these categorical distinctions, except only in very general terms, fail to have much explanatory value, since one can find many exceptions to them within individual thinkers and documents.

Both Gnostics and Platonists agree that there is something deficient about the human situation in the world and are optimistic that the divine principle behind all things has already provided for its solution, and that this solution can be discovered and taught to whomever will listen to it and work in a rigorous and disciplined way to realize it for themselves. Both groups tend also to be pessimistic about the prospects for the general mass of human kind, who do not possess sufficient reflective or gnostic powers to take this teaching seriously (cf. the gnostic distinction between spiritual and hylic persons with Plotinus' distinction between philosophers, the σπουδαῖοι and the common rabble, the φαῦλος ὄχλος in *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 9,1-11).

On the whole, Gnostics tend to stress the hidden but revealed character of the solution, yet Platonists also tend to see it as apparent only to a very few elite individuals. Both groups tend to see the human being situated in a struggle for the self-knowledge that leads to salvation. By virtue of their reliance upon myth, most gnostics, but few Platonists, tend to see the antagonist in this struggle as anterior and exterior to the psycho-physical complex of the human individual. But both groups also exteriorize and "anteriorize" the psycho-physical complex itself into a cosmic frame that has its own soul and body. The apparent Gnostic hostility toward the world and the body is in reality fear of succumbing to excessive natural impulses symbolized by proactive spiritual and astral forces such as fate that govern world and body, rather than its materiality as such. Platonists, on the other hand, tend to have in mind a certain inherent and necessary intractability of the material substrate of physical world or certain passions of the soul which refuse complete submission to rational formation, rather than the proactive hostility of the gnostic archons.

In the final analysis, it seems to me that the basic difference between the two lies in a preference either for myth and dramatic personification, or for conceptual analysis and distinction as a vehicle for explaining the same human problematic. Rather than accounting for their common pessimism and optimism in terms of a theory of social crisis, however, it seems more promising to view both groups as engaging in a common enterprise to apply—and where necessary to reinterpret—ancient traditional wisdom to the even more age-old problem of the situation of the self within an ever-changing world.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THE PLATONIZING SETHIAN TREATISES

I. The General Structure of the Ascent

In the Platonizing Sethian treatises, salvific knowledge of the divine is not enabled by visitations from descending divine revealers, but by a self-actualized technique of spiritual ascent to the divine. Of the four Platonizing Sethian treatises, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes* convey this technique by the example of the experience of a single visionary, be it Zostrianos, Allogenes, or Marsanes, while the *Three Steles of Seth* provides a community of aspiring visionaries with a set of exemplary doxological prayers long ago uttered by Seth in the course of his own spiritual ascent to the supreme deity, but without actually describing that ascent. In all these treatises, enlightenment results from a rather fixed sequence of successively refined intellectual operations on the part of the aspiring gnostic. In the narrated ascents, ever higher objects of contemplation are matched with different kinds of cognition appropriate to them, ranging from active questioning and discursive/analytical thinking to passive contemplation, a phenomenon increasingly noticeable as one passes from *Marsanes* to *Zostrianos* and especially to *Allogenes*. These include: 1) a preliminary, earthly stage of discursive cognition that suffices to distinguish the corporeal and incorporeal realm of becoming from the eternal, changeless realm of incorporeal essences, 2) a non-discursive cognition of the realm of pure, incorporeal being induced by an out-of-the-body contemplative ascent to the divine intellect or its equivalent; and 3) a final stage of non-cognitive contemplation of supreme principles that are altogether beyond being in which both the psycho-physical and the intellectual faculties have been abandoned.

In the three treatises that portray the ascent, the accounts of the visions proceed in more or less serial order from the lowest to the highest degree of reality. In *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, the visionary ascent is actually narrated as it occurs, and each stage of the ascent is prefaced and accompanied by explanatory instruction from a revealer,

while *Marsanes* merely announces the fact of its accomplishment and delivers the corresponding explanations in his own person.

The visionary experience comprises two essential components, the ascent and the descent. Contemplative ascent results, not in a permanent residence in the divine realm, but in a descent back to the world of everyday experience, where its accomplishment can be shared with other aspiring candidates for enlightenment.[1] Since the visionary ascent actually anticipates the final separation of soul from body at the end of one's mortal life, both the ascent and the descent are necessary, not only to enable and authorize the teaching of this technique of self-salvation to other "worthy" persons for their emulation, but to demonstrate its "success." As the *Three Steles of Seth* puts it:

> **VII 127** [12] For individually and collectively they all praise [13] these (Autogenes, the Barbelo Aeon, and the pre-existent One): and afterward they shall be [14] silent. And just as it has [15] been ordained for them, they will ascend. [16] After silence, they will descend [17] from the third: [18] they will bless the second; [19] and afterward, the first. [20] The way of ascent is the way [21] of descent. Understand, then, [22] O you who live, that you have [23] succeeded, and have taught [24] yourselves about the infinites: [25] marvel at the truth that is within [26] them, and the revelation.

While *Zostrianos* briefly narrates Zostrianos' descent, the descents of Allogenes and Marsanes are not narrated. Upon completion of the transcendent journey, Zostrianos and Allogenes record the revelations they have received for the benefit of "those who will come" or "be worthy after them." Zostrianos inscribes the revelation on three wooden tablets that he leaves behind in heaven, returns to earth and begins a career of preaching to the errant masses, and only at some later point produces the earthly copy of the revelation that currently bears his name. Although

1. In the case of Iamblichus, G. SHAW ("After Aporia: Theurgy in Later Platonism," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik [SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001]), 57-82, esp. 80: "From the perspective of the embodied soul, theurgy enflamed its god-given *erôs* and lifted it to the gods. Yet once elevated, and having ritually taken on the shape of the gods, the soul joined their cosmogony and descended demiurgically into the world." In the Platonizing Sethian treatises, it seems that rather than performing a cosmological and demiurgical function (inspired by Iamblichus' reading of the *Timaeus*), the descent is intended to inform a community about the possibility of the ascent and the final post-mortem return of the soul to its origins.

the visionary must return to his or her original ontic nature, the transformations in spiritual status are presumably permanent.

> **VIII 4** [13] Come and transcend these [realms]! [14] You will return to them another [time] [15] to proclaim a living [race], [16] to save those who are [17] worthy and to empower the elect. [18] For great is the struggle of this age, [19] but the time [in] this world is short.

> **VIII 129** [16] I came [17] forth to the perfect individuals. [18] All of them were questioning [19] me, listening to the [20] majesty of the knowledge, [21] rejoicing and [22] receiving power. When I again [23] came down to the [24] Self-generated Aeons, I received a true [25] image, pure, worthy [26] of perception. I came [27] down to the Aeonic copies [28] and came down here **130** [1] to the atmospheric [realm]. I wrote [2] three wooden tablets and left them [3] as knowledge for those who would [4] come after me, the living elect. [5] Then I came down to the perceptible [6] world and put on [7] my image. Because it was uninstructed, [8] I empowered it and went about [9] preaching the truth to everyone.

On the other hand, Allogenes apparently descends to earth and writes down the treatise named after him as an earthly transcript of his own revelatory experiences for his worthy successors and deposits it on a mountain, leaving to his son Messos the task of proclaiming them:

> **XI 67** [20] And concerning [21] all these matters, you have heard [22] certainly. And do not [23] seek anything more, [24] but go. [25] We do not know whether [26] the Unknowable One has [27] angels or [28] gods, or whether the One who is at rest [29] contains [30] anything within himself except [31] the stillness which he is, [32] lest he be diminished. [33] It is not fitting to [34] waste more [35] time seeking. It was [36] appropriate that you <alone> know [37] and that they speak [38] with another. But you will receive them **68** [1] [...] [2] [...] [3] [...] [4] [...] [5] [...] [6] [...] [7] [...] [8] [...] [9] [...] [10] [...] [11] [...] [12] [...] [13] [...] [14] [...] [15] [...] [16] [and he said to me: "Write down] [17] [the things] that I shall [tell] you and [18] of which I shall remind you [19] for those who will be worthy [20] after you. And you will leave [21] this book upon a mountain [22] and you will adjure the guardian: [23] 'Come, Dreadful One!'" [24] And when he said these things, he separated [25] from me. But I was full [26] of joy, and I wrote [27] this book which was appointed [28] for me, my son Messos, in order [29] that I might disclose to you the matters that [30] were proclaimed before [31] me, within me..... **69** [14] [... proclaim] [15] [them, O my] [16] son Messos.

On completion of his own ascent and descent, Zostrianos assures the "seed of Seth" that to abandon worldliness and to seek one's self-salvation will ensure the ultimate ascent of the soul:

> **VIII 131** [14] But an errant multitude [15] I awakened, saying: [16] "Understand, you who are alive, the holy [17] seed of Seth! Do not [be] [18] disobedient to

me. [Awaken] [19] your divine part as divine, and [20] empower your sinless elect soul. [21] Mark the [22] passing of this world and [23] seek the immutable [24] ingenerateness. The [Father] of [25] all these invites you [26] as he awaits you. And even when you are ill-treated, **132** [1] he will not abandon you. [2] Do not baptize yourselves with death [3] nor entrust yourselves to things [4] inferior to you as if to [5] superior things. Flee the madness [6] and the bondage of femininity, [7] and choose for yourselves the salvation [8] of masculinity. You have [9] not come to suffer; rather, you have [10] come to escape your bondage. Release [11] yourselves, and that which has bound [12] you will be nullified. Save [13] yourselves, that that one (your soul) [14] may be saved."

Marsanes too has ascended from the perceptible to the intelligible realm and beyond, but rather than narrating it as it took place, he tends to excerpt and discuss its various features. The ascent confirms the certainty of salvation:

X 2 [12] But as for the thirteenth [13] seal, I have confirmed it [14] together with [the] limit of [15] knowledge and the certainty [16] of rest— (... here follows the enumeration of the thirteen seals ...) — **4** [24] for it is I who have [25] [contemplated (νοεῖν)] that which truly exists.

X 5 [17] I have discriminated (διακρίνειν) [18] and have attained the boundary of the partial sense-perceptible [19] world (and) [20] the entire realm [21] of the incorporeal essence. And [22] the intelligible world [23] has come to know by discrimination [24] that in every respect the sense-perceptible [25] world is [worthy] [26] of being preserved entire.

Marsanes ascends, becomes silent, and descends. Not only is Marsanes' ascent and descent paradigmatic for his followers, but his own ascent and descent is in turn modeled upon the ascent and descent of the Invisible Spirit itself:[2]

X 9 [29] [Again] the Invisible [Spirit] **10** [1] ran up [2] to his place. The entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm) [3] was revealed, the entire place unfolded [4] <until> he reached the upper region. [5] Again he went forth and caused the [6] entire place to be illuminated, and the entire [7] place was illuminated.

Marsanes presents himself as one who has thoroughly deliberated upon and experienced the full reality of both the sensible and intelligible worlds, who has been infused with the very power of the Barbelo Aeon, and even seen and come to know the supreme principles themselves, the

2. In a way reminiscent of Plotinus, the spiritual world of *Marsanes* is dynamic, full of a vertical oscillation that, in spite of the presence of levels whose absolute values are superior or inferior in relation to one another, insures that it remains a connected whole.

Invisible Spirit and its Triple Powered One, as well as the ultimate Unknown Silent One. His authority as inspired teacher is thus beyond question, yet such experiences are not reserved for himself alone; indeed he conveys to his followers the Barbelo Aeon's own exhortation to his followers that they too contemplate and ascend to the realities that lie beyond its own transcendental level. In a similar way, the written records of their ascents left behind by Zostrianos and Allogenes for the worthy elect who shall follow them as well as the communal character suggested by the first-person plural doxologies in the *Three Steles of Seth* testify that such visionary ascents are not the sole prerogative of a few chosen visionaries but are a prospect that is extended to all who would emulate them.

It is also interesting that in the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, and *Marsanes*, the vision of the Aeon of Barbelo represents a certain sort of victory, since it results in the receipt of a crown:

VII 120 [29] We praise you, O Triple Male: [30] for you have unified the entirety [31] from out of all. For you have [32] empowered us. You have come into existence from [33] Unity. Through Unity you have emanated; [34] into Unity you have entered. [You] have saved, [35] you have saved, you have saved us. O [36] you who are crowned, O you who crown: **121** [1] we praise you eternally. [2] We praise you—we who have been saved, [3] as the perfect individuals, [4] We who are perfect because [5] of you, We who [became] perfect along with you.

VIII 129 [2] Apophantes and Aphropais the [3] Virgin-light came before me [4] and brought me to Protophanes, [5] the great male perfect [6] Mind. There I saw all of them [7] as they dwell [8] in unity. I united [9] with them all and blessed the [10] Kalyptos aeon, the [11] virginal Barbelo, and the Invisible [12] Spirit. I became all-perfect [13] and was empowered. I was inscribed [14] in glory and sealed. [15] There I received [16] a perfect crown.

X 10 [12] O [13] [inhabitants of these] places! It is necessary [14] [for you (sg.) to contemplate (*noein*)] those that are higher [15] than these, and tell them to the [16] powers. For you (sg.) will become [17] [better] than the elect [18] [in the last] times. [19] Upward mounts the Invisible Spirit! [20] And you [21] [yourselves], ascend with him [22] [up above], since you have [23] [the] great [radiant] crown.

The Goal: Assimilation to the Divine so far as Possible

The three treatises that describe the ascent of an exemplary visionary tripartition the ascent into distinct cognitive stages appropriate to the

cognition of the ontological character of each level traversed by the visionary, since the object of the ascent is to become assimilated with successively higher and more refined levels of being, culminating in the ultimate unitary principle beyond being. The goal is a flight toward assimilation to God insofar as possible (φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν):

> But it is impossible that evils should be done away with, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good; and they cannot have their place among the gods, but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth. Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; [176B] and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise. (Plato, *Theaetetus* 176AB)

Marsanes (X 10,12-23, cited above) expresses this goal through the words of the Barbelo Aeon itself, as it exhorts those who contemplate its own nature to rise yet higher. *Zostrianos* proffers the same goal, with greater emphasis on the self-actualized character of the ascent. Exercise of one's rational faculty (the Logos) enables one to intuit the simplicity and unity that lies behind its varying images in the phenomenal world; by seeking this unity, one discovers and withdraws into one's intellect—and thus into oneself; this is tantamount to withdrawing into god and becoming divine:

> **VIII 44** [1] Now the (type of) person that can be saved [2] is the one that seeks itself and [3] its intellect and finds each [4] of them. And how much power [5] this (type) has! [5] The person [6] that has been saved is one who has not known [7] about these things [merely] as [8] they (formally) exist, but one [9] who is personally involved with [the] rational faculty [10] as it exists [in him]. [11] He has grasped their [image that is different] [12] in every situation as though they had become [13] simple and one. For then [14] this (type) is saved who can [15] pass through [them] all; [16] [he becomes] [17] them all. Whenever it [18] [wishes], it again parts [19] from all these matters and [20] withdraws into itself; [21] for it becomes divine, [22] having withdrawn into god.

On the other hand, the mind may become distracted with other things, causing a failure of the mind's apprehension of this unity; even though possessing the immortal power of intellect, one's thought (νόημα) fails to understand the images and instead of withdrawing into god, one descends into the realm of becoming and continual reincarnation.

> **VIII 45** [12] When (this type) repeatedly withdraws [13] into itself alone [14] and is occupied with [15] the knowledge of other things, [16] since the intellect and immortal [soul] do [not] [17] intelligize, it thereupon [18] experiences deficiency, [19] for it too turns, has nothing, and [20] separates from it (the intellect) and [21] stands [apart] and experiences [22] an alien [impulse] [23] instead of becoming a unity. [24] So that (type of person) resembles many forms. [25] And when it turns aside, it [26] comes into being seeking those things that [27] do not exist. When it [28] descends to them in thought, [29] it cannot understand them [30] in any other way unless 46 [1] it be enlightened, and it becomes [2] a physical entity. Thus this type of person [3] accordingly descends into generation, [4] and becomes speechless because of the [5] difficulties and indefiniteness [6] of matter. Although possessing [7] eternal, immortal power, [8] (this type) is bound in the clutches of [9] the body, [removed], [10] and [continually] bound [11] within strong bonds, [12] lacerated [13] by every evil spirit, until [14] it once more [reconstitutes itself] and begins again [15] to inhabit it.

II. Preliminary Seeking by Discursive Means

The visionary ascent always originates in an earthly, embodied context in which one prepares for the ascent by a mental and behavioral rejection of worldly concerns and attractions and a concomitant orientation of the discursive mind toward the transcendent realm. This orientation may be expressed in the form of prayers and invocations directed toward the Aeon of Barbelo and certain of its constituents, or in the form of reflection upon the nature of ultimate reality by means of metaphysical categories derived from contemporary Platonic philosophy.

Especially in the case of the three treatises that feature the visionary ascent of an exemplary individual such as Zostrianos, Allogenes, or Marsanes, the ascent is noticeably articulated according to an epistemological technique that distinguishes between various degrees of knowledge ranging from acquaintance with everyday phenomena, through rational analysis of these phenomena in search of their ultimate causes, and ending with direct insight into the nature of ultimate reality. The first stage on the path to ultimate insight is then to replace one's common everyday knowledge of things with an investigation their causes through discursive means, that is, a step-by-step process of making distinctions between cause and effect and between the relation of various realities to one another.

The distinction between discursive reasoning and visionary insight typical of the Platonizing Sethian treatises goes back to Plato's distinc-

tion between discursive and dialectical intellection. According to the divided line simile of *Republic* VII 511A-E cited and discussed in Chapter 11 (p. 475), Plato distinguished two basic kinds of knowledge, opinion (δόξα) and science (ἐπιστήμη); opinion can be further divided into imagination (εἰκασία) and belief (πίστις), while science can be further divided into mediated knowledge (διάνοια) and pure intellection (νόησις).[3] These four kinds or knowledge are distinguished by reference to their respective objects of focus: shadows and images of sensible things, the sensible objects themselves, the recognition of Forms through sensible particulars and hypothetical deduction, and lastly, the direct apprehension or intuition of the Forms and the supreme principles and their interrelations, an activity known as dialectic. Discursive reasoning (διάνοια) includes inferring conclusions from unquestioned assumptions as well as the generation of mental conceptions from the perception of sensible things. Dialectic altogether transcends the senses and the sensibles for direct apprehension of the ideas. In the *Phaedrus* (265D3-266C1, cited in Chapter 11, p. 476), Plato distinguishes two kinds of dialectic, an ascending or "synoptic" dialectic that moves through successive ideas to the supreme idea, and a descending, "diairetic" dialectic that moves from higher and more general ideas to particular ideas. One thus moves synthetically from multiplicity to unity and analytically from unity to its expressed multiplicity. The same dialectical procedure is further described in the *Sophist* (253DE, cited in Chapter 11, p. 477). Closer in time to the conceptual world of *Marsanes*, Plotinus refers intellection and discursive reasoning to their own separate faculties, Intellect and Soul. According to *Ennead* I, 3 [20] 4,13-14 (cited in Chapter 11, p. 481), reason deals with its objects piecemeal, moving from one discrete object to the next, or from premises and hypotheses to conclusions, while Intellect goes beyond reason by seeing its objects all at once and as a whole (rather after the fashion of Plato's "synoptic" dialectic).

3. According to Aristotle (*De anima* 404b16 ff.; cf. Plato, *Laws* 894A), in the soul the four primary numbers become the geometrical entities point, line, plane and solid corresponding to the four modes of cognition, intuitive knowledge (νόησις), discursive knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), opinion (δόξα), and perception (αἴσθησις) respectively.

A. The *Three Steles of Seth*

Given the character of the *Three Steles of Seth* as a prayer book to be used in the visionary ascent, it contains no narration of the either the epistemological or ontological stages of the ascent, which have to be inferred from its sequence of doxologies and petitions.[4] The collection is prefaced by Seth's praise of his father Pigeradamas, the divine Adam, as the proximate enabler of salvation.

> **VII 118** [25] I praise [26] you, O father, Pigeradamas—I, [27] your own son [28] Emmakha Seth, whom you have [29] ingenerately produced for the praise [30] of our god. For I am [31] your own son.

Seth's praise concludes with a prayer directed to the divine Autogenes, emphasizing the contemplative or intellectual character of the ascent:

> **VII 119** [25] It is you (Autogenes) who are the one that is: therefore [26] you have revealed those that truly exist. [27] It is you who are spoken of [28] by voice: [29] but by intellect you are [30] glorified. It is you who are [31] powerful everywhere. Therefore because of you and your seed [32] [the] perceptible universe [33] knows you: you are merciful.

At this point, there follows the initial prayer of Seth's descendants, the "perfect individuals," directed to the Triple Male, who in this case is the Aeon of Barbelo (VII 120,29-121,5, cited above p. 641).

B. *Zostrianos*

As preparation for the ascent, Zostrianos begins by separating himself from corporeal darkness, psychic chaos, lustful femininity, and the boundlessness of his material nature, and by rejecting the dead creation within himself as well as the ruler of the perceptible world (VIII 1,10-19). The asceticism of *Zostrianos* appears to be fundamentally an intellectual orientation rather than a pattern of behavior. The body is not to be mortified in any way (VIII 3,20-4,5); it is certainly regarded as a source of bondage (VIII 131,25-132,5, cited above, p. 639), having the power to seduce one's attention from the things of the spirit by virtue of

4. The first of the three steles is devoted, not solely to Autogenes, but to Pigeradamas (VII 118,25-119,15), Autogenes (VII 119,15-120,17), *and* to Barbelo as Triple Male (VII 120,17-121,16; cf. B. LAYTON, The *Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987], 152-153), while the second Stele is devoted to Barbelo alone and the third to the supreme pre-existent living Spirit.

the "boundlessness" of its appetites. Attention to the body and the emotions darkens and perturbs the mind, leading one away from stability, simplicity, unity, clarity, and self-sufficiency (the "salvation of masculinity") toward the condition of instability, duality, ambiguity, and deficiency, here characterized as lustful femininity (cf. VIII 131,5-8).

Zostrianos then supplements this rather negative regimen with certain positive efforts, including improving his sinless soul and strengthening his inner intellectual spirit, so that he is able to awaken from dark sleep, find his paternal God, and receive a "holy spirit" (VIII 1,30-2,7). Zostrianos does all that he can to live a sinless life and awaken himself to the life of the mind, which leads him initially to the reality of his ancestral god.

> **VIII 1** [30] When I had improved my sinless [31] soul, then I strengthened **2** [1] the intellectual [spirit within me] [2] and I [was able to awaken from] [3] the [dark sleep and find] [4] my [paternal] God [...] [5] [...]. Although I had [worked on this in every way], I [6] was fortified with a holy spirit [7] higher than god. [It settled] [8] upon me alone as I was improving myself, [and] [9] I saw the perfect Child—[who he is] [10] as well as what [he possesses]— [11] often and [variously] [12] appearing to me like this—a [13] consenting [unity]—as I was seeking the [14] [male] father (probably Barbelo) of all things [that are] [15] conceptual and sensible, [16] specific and generic, [partial] [17] and whole, [18] containing and contained, [19] corporeal and incorporeal, [20] essential and material, and [matters] [21] pertaining to all these, and the Existence that is [22] combined with them and with the god of [23] this <perfect child>, the ingenerate Kalyptos, even the power [24] [in] them all.

But to know the ultimate principle behind all the categories of existence requires an enlightenment beyond that afforded by one's customary local deity, and so he takes up with metaphysical philosophy by pondering the origin of multiplicity from original unity; he offers his reflections to his paternal god, praising his wise ancestors and their tradition, and continues to seek a place of repose for his spirit beyond the perceptible world (VIII 3,14-23).

> **VIII 2** [13] I was seeking the [14] [male] father of all things [that are] [15] conceptual and sensible, [16] specific and generic, [partial] [17] and whole, [18] containing and contained, [19] corporeal and incorporeal, [20] essential and material, and [matters] [21] pertaining to all these, and the Existence that is [22] combined with them and with the god of [23] this <perfect child>, the ingenerate Kalyptos, even the power [24] [in] them all. Now as for Existence: [25] How can beings—since they are from [26] the aeon of those who derive from [27] an invisible and undivided [28] self-generated Spirit as triform [29] unengendered images—both have [30] an origin superior to Existence [31] and pre-exist all [these] [32] and yet have come to be in the [world]? [33] How do those in its presence with all these **3** [1] [originate from the] Good [2] [that is above]? What sort [of power] and [3] [cause, and] what is [the] place of that [one]? [4] What is its principle? [5] How does its product [6] belong both to it and all these? How, [7] [being a] simple [unity], [8] does it differ [from] itself, given that it exists as [9] Existence, Form, and [10] Blessedness, and, being vitally alive, [11] grants power? How [12] has Existence which has no being [13] appeared in a power that has being?

Zostrianos first focuses on the basic conceptual categories of determinate reality, which serve to characterize, listed here in superior/inferior or more/less-inclusive pairs: the distinction between objects of thought (ἔννοια) and objects of perception (αἴσθησις), between genus and species, whole and part, container (περιέχον) and contained (περιεχόμενον), corporeal and incorporeal, and determinate substance (οὐσία) and matter (ὕλη).[5] These conceptual categories are affirmed to have actual existence as ideal entities in the Aeon of Barbelo, where they are combined with Existence (ὕπαρξις) and power (here identified with the ingenerate Kalyptos).

Thereupon, *Zostrianos* shifts his attention from the categories of determinate being to an even more abstract reality, Existence (ὕπαρχις), the term used also by the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Allogenes* (and by the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* and the later Neoplatonists) to denote the pure infinitival being that is prior to determinate being (τὸ ὄν). Zostrianos here puzzles on the question: how can the "triform unengendered images" that comprise the pluriform ideal world of pure, determinate being arise from a unitary source that transcends—and therefore lacks—determinate being?[6]

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5. A similar catalogue occurs in Damascius, *Dub. et sol.* II.181,26-182,15. On the sense of οὐσία, "substance" or "essence," see L. BRISSON, *Le même et l'autre dans la structure ontologique du Timée de Platon: Un commentaire systématique du Timée de Platon* (Sankt Augustin: Academie Verlag, 2nd rev. ed., 1994), 273, n. 4.

6. As a simple unity of pure, infinitival being, this supreme One entirely transcends being, but as source of the determinate being and power that derives from it, it must somehow differ from itself. Thus there are two moments or aspects of the One: its self-identity is an implicit duality of 1) absolute transcendence and 2) active, infinitival being which can be characterized as a dyadic otherness (cf. *Marsanes* X 7,6-8: "it is a pre-existent otherness belonging to that which actualizes [ενεργεῖν] the Silent One" and Plotinus (*Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 13,17-18), or as an indefinite dyad or intelligible matter (Plotinus, *Ennead* II, 4 [12] 5), or as a passive receptacle as in Plato's *Timaeus* (*Zostrianos* VIII 91,15-22). The triform unengendered images are

Zostrianos' perplexity drives him into a crisis of suicidal despair at the feebleness of his unaided natural faculties to achieve enlightenment, when suddenly the angel of knowledge intervenes and invites him to undertake the visionary ascent (VIII 3,23-4,19), which begins immediately:

> **VIII 4** [20] When he had said this [to me] [21] I very eagerly and very [22] gladly embarked with him [23] upon a great luminous cloud, and [left] [24] my molded form upon the earth, [25] guarded by glories.

It is interesting to note that Allogenes has the opposite experience, no doubt because, while still on the earthly plane, he has been gradually introduced to such profound matters by Youel's preparatory revelations:

> **XI 57** [24] Now after [25] the all-glorious one, Youel, said these things, [26] she separated from me and left [27] me. But I did not despair [28] of the words I heard. [29] I prepared myself [30] therein and I deliberated [31] with myself for a hundred years.

Zostrianos' abandons his physical body to be guarded by "glories," spiritual helpers who insure that it will not decompose or be inhabited by a soul other than his own during his temporary absence, since upon his descent, it must become the vehicle for his mission of proclaiming what he has learned to the rest of the elect.

C. *Allogenes*

As in *Zostrianos*, so also in *Allogenes* each stage of the ascent is prefaced by instruction from a revealer. Unfortunately, the initial six lines of *Allogenes* are missing, and so one cannot be sure of the identity of the revealer who initially appears to Allogenes, but it is presumably the "all-glorious" Youel, the mother of the glories. In *Allogenes*, Youel is apparently the first and only revealer other than the Luminaries to appear to Allogenes, and she appears to him on the earthly plane while he is still

presumably the three sorts of determinate being composing the Barbelo Aeon: those who truly exist, the all-perfect who are unified, and the perfect individuals, which are presided over by Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes respectively. Insofar as Kalyptos, uppermost in the Barbelo Aeon, is identified with Existence, the origin of these beings lies in a pre-existent principle superior to Existence, namely either in Barbelo or in the Invisible Spirit.

in his earthly garment.[7] Under Youel's tutelage, he acquires the wisdom to distinguish between immeasurable forms and unknowable principles, perceives the Good within himself, sees the glories of the Autogenes and Protophanes Aeons, hears about the Triple Powered One "things that are reserved only for those able to hear," and becomes divine and perfect in preparation for the ultimate revelation of the supreme unknown One.

Youel's five revelations to Allogenes enable him to achieve a vision of the aeonic levels extending from Autogenes through the summit of the Barbelo Aeon. At the end of Youel's first revelation (XI 45,6-49,38), Allogenes becomes divine and declares to her: "I fear that my wisdom has become something beyond what is fitting." At the end of her second revelation (XI 50,17-51,38), his wisdom has become complete, having known the Good within him. At the end of her third revelation (52,13-55,11), Allogenes sees the glories in the Barbelo Aeon.[8] In her fifth and final revelation (XI 55,33-57,24), Youel promises Allogenes that his earnest seeking for a period of 100 years—during which he is presumably to engage in self-contemplation, experiencing "a great light and a blessed path" (XI 57,27-58,7)—will enable him to know *himself* as the Good that dwells with the pre-existent God, thus "filling him with the Logos to completion." At this point he will have become divine and perfect, ready to receive a primary revelation from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon (Salamex, Semen, and Armê), that will enable a form of passive understanding in which the visionary no longer comprehends but is instead comprehended by the object of his contemplation

7. In *Zostrianos*, Youel is the third in a series of three heavenly revealers (Authrounios, Ephesech, Youel, and the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon), and appears to him only in the heavenly plane, where she administers Zostrianos' final baptisms. Here, her role is less exalted, limited to explaining the significance of certain "crowns" and to administering Zostrianos' two baptisms prior to his entry into the Protophanes Aeon. Here and in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, she functions exclusively in the transcendent realm, while in *Allogenes*, she descends as revealer to the earthly realm.

8. Interpreted in the light of the ontology of the treatise, it seems as if Allogenes, while still in his earthly body, has already achieved a certain assimilation to the various levels of the Barbelo Aeon by the mere act of guided contemplation: first, to the level of the "individuals" within Autogenes, and second, to the level of "those who are unified" within Protophanes, and third, to "those who truly exist" in Kalyptos. Yet even this power of discrimination is insufficient for comprehending the Invisible Spirit, who transcends knowledge itself, and is unknowable even by Youel's perfect comprehension (XI 53,18-23).

(XI 56,15-57,11). If Allogenes is successful in this, he will receive a conception (ἔννοια) of the pre-existent One and know himself as one "who exists with the God who truly pre-exists" (XI 56,18-36). Thereupon, Youel departs and Allogenes, after an "incubation period" of 100 years, receives a complete vision of the Barbelo Aeon (XI 58,7-26).

After each of these successive revelations, Allogenes achieves a certain progression in his understanding: 1) on the basis of hearing and discursive thought he can mentally distinguish between transcendent forms and the principles beyond them; 2) on the basis of wisdom he knows the Good within himself; 3) on the basis of vision, he comes to see the glories of the Barbelo Aeon and realize the existence of principles even prior to this, even though it is impossible to fully comprehend them.

D. *Marsanes*

Marsanes begins the account of his ascent by establishing that he has contemplated (νοεῖν) that which really exists (i.e., τά ὄντως ὄντα), and proceeds to review the stages that led him to that result.

> **X 4** [24] For I am he who has [25] [intelligized] that which truly exists, [26] [whether] individually or [27] [as a whole], by difference (κατὰ διαφορά cf. *Republic* VI 509D-511E) [28] [I knew] that they [pre]-exist [29] [in the] entire place that is **5** [1] eternal: all those that have come into [2] existence, whether without substance [3] or with substance, those who are [4] unbegotten, and the divine aeons, [5] as well as the angels and the [6] souls without guile [7] and the soul-[garments], [8] the images of [the] [9] simple ones (souls?). And [afterwards they] [10] were mixed with [those that were distinct from] [11] them (i.e., their bodies?). But [even the] [12] entire [perceptible] substance [13] still resembles the [intelligible substance] [14] as well as the insubstantial. [I have known] [15] the entire corruption [of the former (the perceptible realm)] [16] as well as the immortality of [17] the latter (fem., i.e., the incorporeal substance). I have discriminated (διακρίνειν cf. Sophist 253DE) [18] and have attained the boundary of the partial, sense-perceptible [19] world (and) [20] the entire realm [21] of the incorporeal essence.

The preliminary stages leading to his vision of the supreme principles are occupied by the use of discursive reasoning, specifically a technique of division: "by difference" (κατὰ διαφορά) he "[knew]" that every existing thing, whether individual or whole, originates in the eternal realm (i.e., in the realm of true being and ideal archetypes).[9]

Like Zostrianos, Marsanes comes to recognize that the multitude of simple things all derive from a prior unity. Thus he is already on the road to dialectical knowledge, yet not completely, since he still perceives Autogenes as the multiplicity of the self-generated ones into which he extends rather than as a unity. As a result, he must seek a yet higher and more prior unity, the "kingdom" of the Triple Powered One, whom he hypothesizes to be the source and power of both unbegotten and self-begotten reality and the origin of the difference among transcendental realities such as the aeons (X 6,2-16). At this point, Marsanes begins to raise profound metaphysical questions not unlike those raised by Zostrianos prior to his own ascent (cited on p. 646):[10]

> **X 6** [12] And from [13] [*the single one*] they (the self-generated ones) [*are*] *divided*, [14] [*so that*] *I experienced* [15] many things, it being manifest [16] that he saved a multitude. [17] But beyond all of these, [18] I am seeking the kingdom [19] of the Triple Powered One, [20] which has no beginning. Whence [21] did he appear and [22] act to fill the [23] the entire place (i.e., the aeonic realm) with his power? And [24] in what way did the unbegotten ones [25] come into existence without being begotten? And [26] what are [the] differences (διαφορά) among the [aeons]? [27] [And] as for those who are unbegotten, [28] how many [are they]? And in what respect [29] [do they differ] from each other? **7** [1] When I had inquired about these things [2] I perceived that he (the Triple Powered One) acted [3] from silence.

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9. This includes both substantial and insubstantial entities: those that are unbegotten (the insubstantial Invisible Spirit and the substantial Aeon of Barbelo), those that are self-begotten, such as the "divine aeons," probably "the [divine] self-generated (αὐτογέννητοι) ones" of X 3,18-25 and 6,7, and finally other, still lower entities, some begotten and others self-begotten, such as angels, innocent souls, and "soul-[garments]." Perhaps these garments are the passions—represented as χιτῶνες donned and shed during the soul's descent and ascent through the planetary spheres—or, less likely, the ethereal but irrational "vehicles" [ὀχήματα] of disincarnate souls.

10. In fact, Marsanes' preliminary questions are reminiscent of those raised by Zostrianos just after he has heard the final revelation delivered by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon: VIII 128,19-129,1: "As for me, I became bold and said: 'I am [still] wondering about the Triple Powered Invisible perfect Spirit— how it exists for itself, [even the cause] for them all [and of] those that truly exist [...] what is the [place of that one] and [of what sort is it?' And after I] said [these things, I was] greatly [glorified], and they set [me] down and left."

In X 7,3-19 Marsanes reports the results of his deliberations on such enigmas: he comes to see the origin of the Triple Powered One, and he sees how the unbegotten ones came to be without being begotten.

III. Ascent through the Aeon of Barbelo

As the Sethian equivalent of the Platonic divine intellect, the ascent through the Barbelo Aeon requires a gradual shift from discursive to contemplative knowledge, as one moves from the largely rational knowledge of individuated ideas and souls ("perfect individuals") presided over by the "demiurgic intellect" Autogenes, toward the dialectical contemplation of the indistinguishable plurality of "those who are unified" in Protophanes, the contemplating intellect, and finally achieves a unified vision of the unique paradigmatic forms or authentic existents (the "hidden ones") resident in Kalyptos, the contemplated intellect. One thus proceeds from discrimination to synthesis to intuition. By this sequence of mental acts one becomes assimilated to successively higher ontological levels, whose nature is apprehended through the perceptual sequence of audition, vision, and silent thought or intellection.

A. The *Three Steles of Seth*

After initial praise of the three-in-one character of the Barbelo Aeon, the second stele of the *Three Steles of Seth* concludes with a petition for the unification of the perfect individuals which results in immediate vision of the Barbelo Aeon. The petition:

> **VII 123** [30] Unify us [31] according as you have been unified. [32] Tell us [of] the things that you behold. [33] Bestow power upon us, so that we might **124** [1] become saved up into eternal life. [2] For, as for us, we are a shadow [3] of you [just] as you are [4] a shadow of that which [5] primally preexists. Hear [6] us first. We are eternal: [7] hear us—we who are [8] perfect individuals. It is you who are the aeon [9] of aeons, O all-perfect One [10] who are unified.

immediately results in the initial ascent:

> You have heard! [11] You have heard! You have saved! You have saved! [12] We give thanks! We praise always! [13] We will glorify you! We rejoice! We rejoice! We rejoice! [18] We have beheld! We have beheld! We have beheld that which [19] really preexists, [20] really existing as it exists!

B. *Zostrianos*

Upon completion of his initial seeking, Zostrianos ascends on the luminous cloud through the levels of the atmospheric realm, the Aeonic Copies, the Sojourn, and the Repentance. While Zostrianos is constantly in motion ("without pausing," VIII 5,22) during the ascent from earth to the Repentance, he comes to "stand" in the Self-generated Aeons. Such standing and stability is the very opposite of the psychic perturbations he experienced on earth prior to the ascent; it is enabled by an act of vision of an ideal reality which is true and most real (ὄντως ὄν).

In contrast to Allogenes and Marsanes, who ascend to the very summit of reality, the ascent of Zostrianos is apparently limited to the first two levels of the Barbelo Aeon even though he receives essentially the same revelations concerning the nature of the supreme principles as do Allogenes and Marsanes. As summarized in Chapter 3, in the course of his visionary ascent, Zostrianos ascends from the earth by means of a luminous cloud through several aeonic levels, eventually arriving at the lower boundary of the Aeon of Barbelo ("the Self-generated Aeons"), at which point he apparently succeeds to a vision of the divine Autogenes and the male Mind Protophanes, where he receives instruction on the nature of the supreme realities from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon.

During the ascent, Zostrianos undergoes various ontic transformations: on earth he moves from a condition of moral improvement to intellectual discernment, and during the ascent, from an earthly being into a glory, thence into various kinds of angel, and finally into a divine being. The shifts in his spiritual status matches those of the successively more transcendent beings he beholds, moving from perceptible to divine, to "truly existing," to "perfect," and finally to "all-perfect." Having transcended the thirteen aeons of the perceptible world, he is baptized, perhaps at the level of the moon, where he receives an image of the glories there and becomes like them (VIII 5,14-17).

Upon each of the first four baptisms, Zostrianos becomes a different sort of angel: contemplative, masculine, holy, and perfect; he "stands" upon each of four aeons, in all probability the Four Lights in ascending

order, the fourth Eleleth, the third Daveithe, the second Oroiael, and the first Armozel.[11]

After his first four baptisms, Zostrianos poses a series of questions concerning the relation of unity to differentiated multiplicity similar to those he pondered (VIII 2,24-3,13) prior to the appearance of the angel of light, but this time focused on the relationship between the various names invoked in the baptismal process and powers resident in the Self-generated Aeons through which he has just passed (VIII 7,22-8,7). The answers to these questions are supplied by two heavenly revealers, Authrounios and Ephesech.

First, Authrounios proceeds to explain the nature of the realms leading up to the Barbelo Aeon (the sensible world and its origin, and the progression from the Aeonic Copies through the Sojourn and Repentance to the Self-generated Aeons described in Chapter 13). Thereupon, Zostrianos becomes assimilated to the nature of all the levels of reality he has thus far traversed:

> **VIII 8** [28] And with him] [29] and [with myself I joined with] [30] [these aeons] that I had [traversed.

Next, it is Ephesech, the Child of the (Triple Male) Child who reveals the nature of the truly transcendent realm, the Barbelo Aeon and what lies beyond it (VIII 13,27-44,22a). The initial subject of this revelation is the significance of the names and waters that figure in the traditional rite of Sethian baptism in terms of their relation to the three powers of the Triple Powered One (Existence, Blessedness/Mind/Knowledge, Vitality/Life) by which the Barbelo Aeon emerges from the Invisible Spirit, and to the three subaeons of the Barbelo Aeon (Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes). Ephesech also reveals that while these entities pre-exist the universe, they in turn originate from an even higher unitary principle, the "single origin of the Barbelo Aeon," namely the supreme Invisible Spirit.

Finally, after the lengthy revelations of Authrounios and Ephesech, Zostrianos becomes "divine" (VIII 53,18-19). Zostrianos' successful

11. Standing upon Eleleth, a "preparation for truth," one's soul finds and loves the truth, and becomes a contemplative "thought" or "angel" (VIII 6,17-21); standing upon Daveithe, a "vision of knowledge," one's soul becomes a male gendered angel (VIII 7,1-9); standing upon Oroiael, a "seer of truth," one's soul becomes a "holy angel" (VIII 7,9-16); and standing upon Armozel, a "joiner of souls," one's soul is joined with truth; there Zostrianos became a "perfect angel" (VIII 7,16-22).

baptism into the waters of Autogenes is narrated in some detail. But in VIII 15,1-12, Ephesech's promise that Zostrianos will be baptized in the water of Protophanes is never fulfilled, although it may be that he "sees" those waters. Significantly, the passage makes no corresponding promise about the waters of Kalyptos, and indeed Zostrianos never arrives at the level of the Kalyptos Aeon, about which he—and presumably any candidate for enlightenment—only "hears." Thus one is baptized in the waters of Autogenes and one sees the waters of Protophanes, but one may only "hear" of Kalyptos by a "far superior revelation." But of the Invisible Spirit, one only gets an "audition and a silent power" (VIII 24,2-17).

C. *Allogenes*

It is noteworthy that the beings praised by Zostrianos (VIII 42,24-31) are the same ones that Allogenes sees at the end of his one hundred-year period of preparation following the revelations of Youel:[12]

> **XI 58** [11] I saw [12] the good divine Autogenes; [13] and
> the Savior [14] who is the [15] youthful, perfect Triple Male; and
> his [16] goodness, the [17] noetic, perfect Protophanes-Harmedon; [18] and
> the Blessedness [19] of the Kalyptos; and
> the [20] primary origin of the Blessedness, [21] the Barbelo-Aeon [22] full of Divinity; [23]
> and the primary origin of [24] the one without origin, the [25] Triple Powered Invisible Spirit ...

The "primal origin of the of the One without origin" is probably the lowest aspect ("blessedness" or Mentality) of the Triple-Powered One, which would be identical with the entirety of the Aeon of Barbelo itself. This initial stage of Allogenes' ascent was already alluded to in XI 48,6-38, where it says that the individuals inhabiting the Autogenes level of the Barbelo Aeon cannot *comprehend* the Invisible Spirit (the Universal one beyond perfection) by an act of mind; yet once they "come together" (at the level of Protophanes) they can *apprehend* him by the passive receipt of a "first thought" (or "preconception") of the pure being of the Kalyptos level (imbued with Existence) which emanates from

12. It is difficult to determine the referent of the two instances of "origin" (ἀρχή) as well as the meaning of the term itself. "The one without origin" likely refers to the Invisible Spirit, while the "primary origin" seems to refer to something ranked below one without origin, most likely the Triple-Powered One.

him. Yet even this power of discrimination is insufficient for comprehending the Invisible Spirit, who transcends knowledge itself, and is unknowable even by Youel's perfect comprehension (XI 53,18-23).

It is particularly noteworthy that Allogenes not only receives initial revelations from Youel but also achieves a vision of the Barbelo Aeon while he still bears his earthly garment (XI 50,8-10).[13] This initial vision culminates in the receipt of a luminous garment by which he is taken up to "a pure place" (XI 58,26-37), where he transcends ("stands upon") his knowledge (characterized by "blessedness" and "self-knowledge") of the individual constituents of the Barbelo-Aeon. He is now ready for the "holy powers" of the "Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo" to reveal the even higher knowledge toward which he had already "inclined," namely "the knowledge of the Universal Ones," that is, of the Triple-Powered One and the Invisible Spirit (XI 59,2-3):

> **XI 58** [26] When I was taken [27] by the eternal light, [28] by [29] the garment that was upon [30] me, and was taken up to [31] a pure place whose [32] likeness cannot be [33] revealed in the world, [34] then by means of a [35] great Blessedness I [36] saw all those about whom I had [37] heard. And I [38] praised them all and I **59** [1] [stood at rest] upon my knowledge and [I] [2] inclined to the Knowledge [of] [3] the Universal Ones, the Barbelo-Aeon.

D. *Marsanes*

Without explicit note or explanation, Marsanes advances beyond discursive and dialectical knowledge of the transcendental realm to enter into a new mode of knowing, that of silent contemplation. He perceives all the aeons in the Barbelo Aeon silently praising the Triple Powered One from whom they have all derived:

> **X 7** [29] [When he appeared] **8** [1] to the powers, they rejoiced. [2] Those that are within me were completed [3] together with all the [4] rest. And they all blessed [5] the Triple Powered One, [6] one by one, who [7] is [the] First-Perfect One, [8] [blessing] him in purity, [every]where [9] praising the Lord [10] [who exists] before the All, [11] [who (is) the] Triple Powered One. [12] [*It did not happen that*] *their* (the powers of the Barbelo Aeon) *worshippings* [13] [*were audible*], but [*it was my part*] [14] [*to keep on*] [15] [*inquiring*] how they had [16] become silent. I would contemplate (νοεῖν) a [17] power that I hold [18] in honor. When the third [19] power (i.e. the Barbelo Aeon) of the Triple Powered One [20] contemplated (νοεῖν) him (the Triple Powered One), [21] it said to me, "Be silent [22] lest you should know and flee [23] and come before me. But [24] know (νοεῖν) that this One was [25] [silent], and concentrate on understanding (νόημα). [26] For [the power still] keeps [27] [guiding] me into [28] [the Aeon which] is Barbelo, [29] [the] male [Virgin]."

Yet his assimilation to the aeonic nature is not truly complete, since, in his own desire to contemplate the Triple Powered One, the incompleteness of his knowledge prompts him to raise yet another question. Although he "perceives" the aeonic praises to be inaudible, he goes on—whether audibly or silently—to inquire of the Barbelo Aeon how the aeons had become silent. But his question is rebuffed by the Barbelo Aeon: "Be silent lest you should know and flee and come before me. But know (νοεῖν) that this One (the Triple Powered One) was [silent], and concentrate on understanding (νόημα)" (X 8,21-25). Here the kind of knowledge that Marsanes is exhorted to avoid is knowledge of the factual or discursive sort—"how" the aeons became silent—to which the Aeon of Barbelo responds by saying that Marsanes must settle for merely "knowing that" the Triple Powered One was silent and must instead concentrate on the activity of intelligizing (νόημα) silently. By transcending discursive and even dialectical knowledge in favor of silent contemplation, he avoids the danger of falling back into an active form of knowing whose result will be, not a knowledge of the Triple Powered One itself, but merely to remain at the level he has already just achieved. This lower kind of knowing will merely cause him to flee away from true contemplation of higher realms and to "come before" the Barbelo Aeon, which would mean merely to return to where he already is. From this point forward, further insight is achieved only by a suppression, not only of positive knowledge, but of any sort of mental activity whatsoever.

Later on in the text, Marsanes says of himself:

> **X 10** [7] And [I] have been given [8] the third part (i.e., knowledge, the Barbelo Aeon) of [9] [the spirit] of the power of the Triple [10] [Powered] [11] [One]! Blessed is [12] [the Aeon (of Barbelo)]!

13. This stands in express contrast with the experience of Zostrianos, who had left his body behind and ascended to the Self-generated Aeons before the receipt of any transcendental revelations. The corresponding experience of Marsanes is indeterminate at this point, for his "attainment" of the boundary between the perceptible and intelligible realms could be interpreted as either a corporeal or extracorporeal experience: X 5,18-20: "I have discriminated and have attained the boundary of the partial, sense-perceptible world (and) the entire realm [21] of the incorporeal essence." See section VI.A below on this-worldly versus otherworldly vision and revelation.

In this instance, it is clear that upon receiving and internalizing this spirit, Marsanes becomes the mouthpiece of the Barbelo Aeon itself, issuing to his followers Barbelo's own invitation to ascend towards the Invisible Spirit:[14]

> **X 10** [12] O [13] [inhabitants of these] places! It is necessary [14] [for you (sg.) to contemplate (νοεῖν)] those that are higher [15] than these, and tell them to the [16] powers. For you (sg.) will become [17] [better] than the elect [18] [in the last] times. [19] Upward mounts the Invisible Spirit! [20] And you [21] [yourselves], ascend with him [22] [up above], since you have [23] [the] great [radiant] crown.

Later still, Marsanes claims that he actually came to dwell in the Aeon of Barbelo, although "separate" from it:

> **X 14** [15] I [was dwelling] [16] among the aeons that were [17] generated. As I was permitted, [I] have [18] come to be among those that were un-[begotten]. [19] But I was dwelling in the [great] [20] Aeon, although I [was separate from it]. [21] And [I saw] [22] [the] three powers [of] [23] the Triple [Powered] One.

Marsanes has advanced to the point of actual identification with the object of his query: he has somehow become assimilated to the Barbelo Aeon to the point that he can speak for that aeon. Although he remains distinct from it, he has entered it to such a degree that he can say that, not only the Barbelo Aeon, but he too contains all the aeons that were "completed" in the Barbelo Aeon; in that sense they are completed also in Marsanes. In effect, he has moved beyond the realm of discursive thought and even of dialectic to what Plato called assimilation to god so far as possible.

IV. The Ascent through the Triple-Powered One

Of the Platonizing Sethian treatises, it is only *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* in which there is an ascent through the powers of the Triple Powered One, since *Zostrianos* limits Zostrianos' ascent to the mid-point of the Barbelo Aeon, and the *Three Steles of Seth* does not seem to treat the Triple Powered One as transcending the Barbelo Aeon.

14. In a similar way, in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, Barbelo issues several such invitations as she reveals herself as the Speech and Logos of the divine First Thought.

A. *The Three Steles of Seth*

Thus the third stele of the *Three Steles of Seth* moves directly to the ascent final to the supreme, pre-existent Invisible Spirit, who is altogether beyond being and determination. As such, he cannot be named or even directly beheld, except indirectly "by means of Intellect," that is, through the Aeon of Barbelo. Nevertheless, in a sense he can be known, not by discursive or even dialectical reasoning, but by means of his own "command" that brings the beholder to the point of utter silence:

> **VII 125** [3] O you who understand yourself [4] through yourself alone! Indeed, there is nothing [5] that is active prior to [6] you. You are spirit, alone and living. [7] And [you] know the One: [8] for we cannot speak of That One, which everywhere belongs to you; [9] For [10] your light is shining upon us. [11] Command us [12] to behold you, so that [13] we might be saved. It is knowledge of you that [14] is the salvation of us all. [15] Command! If you [16] command, then we have been saved! Truly we have been [17] saved! We have beheld you by means of Intellect. [18] It is you who are all these (spiritual beings).
>
> **VII 127** [12] For individually and collectively they all praise [13] these: and afterward they shall be [14] silent. And just as it has [15] been ordained for them, they will ascend; [16] after silence, they will descend.

Although the *Three Steles of Seth* does not directly discuss the stages of cognition appropriate to the ascent, it seems that the final stage is characterized as "silence," which probably signifies a complete suppression, not only of discursive thought, but of any sort of cognition whatsoever. Moreover, the "command" sought from the supreme One seems equivalent to the "primary revelation" offered to Allogenes by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon: in both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, this turns out to be a negative theology.

B. *Zostrianos*

At his fifth baptism in the name of Autogenes, Zostrianos stands upon the "fifth" aeon, that is, upon the entire assemblage of the Self-generated Aeons and becomes "divine" (VIII 53,15-24).[15] After he is baptized once again, apparently by Youel in the living water associated with the Triple Male Child, she grants him power, form, semblance, incalculable

15. The narration of the fifth baptism is separated from the narration of the first four by 46 pages, into which the author inserts the lengthy revelations of Authrounios and Ephesech the Child of the Child.

light, and "a holy spirit," such that he becomes "[truly] existing" (VIII 60,8-14). Entering the aeon of the Triple Male Child, he is baptized for the final time by Youel, whereupon he becomes "[perfect for] the hearing of all [these matters]" (VIII 61,15-62,17). Zostrianos' baptisms and direct visions seem to terminate immediately before the Aeon of Protophanes; beginning with the Kalyptos ("hidden") Aeon, those realities and the ones beyond are hidden from his direct observation, and are made available to him only by hearing the lengthy revelatory discourse from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon (which nevertheless informs him of matters unknown even to gods and angels!). Limited as it is to the aeon of Autogenes, the lowest level of the Barbelo Aeon, Zostrianos' ascent stands in apparent contrast to those described in *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*, where those respective visionaries—without the benefit of any explicit transcendental baptisms—ascend to the summit of the Barbelo Aeon and beyond, even experiencing the three powers of the Invisible Spirit.

When he is brought before Protophanes, Zostrianos "stands at rest upon his spirit" praying fervently to the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon "by thought" (VIII 63,8-20). After receiving the revelation of these Luminaries, he sees and unites with all the spiritual beings there (in the Protophanes Aeon); after blessing the Kalyptos aeon, Barbelo, and the Invisible Spirit, and being empowered, he is inscribed in glory, sealed and crowned, becoming "all-perfect" (VIII 129,6-16).[16]

C. *Allogenes*

Unlike Zostrianos, Allogenes not only ascends to the acme of the Barbelo Aeon, where he enters a state of Blessedness, but he also is afforded an opportunity to ascend through the various modalities of the Triple Powered One, and finally to receive a disclosure of the supreme Invisible Spirit itself. Allogenes' ascent beyond the Aeon of Barbelo to

16. According to the Hekhalot text *Ma'aseh Merkabah*, a similar series of attributes is acquired by the Jewish mystic who descends to the divine chariot: "R. Akiba said to me: Were uprightness and righteousness in your heart then you would know how many measures are in heaven. He said to me: When I was in the first palace I was righteous, in the second palace I was pure, in the third palace I was upright, in the fourth palace I was perfect, in the fifth palace I arrived holy before the king of kings, blessed be he" (*Ma'aseh Merkabah 9*, cited in N. JANOWITZ, *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1989], 41).

the Unknowable One is first revealed to Allogenes by holy powers (XI 59,4-60,12) and then actually narrated (XI 60,12-61,22) by Allogenes.

> **XI 59** [4] And I saw [multiple] powers [5] by means of the Luminaries [6] of the male virginal Barbelo [7] telling [me]: [8] "O great power! O name that has [9] come to be in the world! O Allogenes, [10] behold your Blessedness, [11] how silently it abides, [12] by which you know [13] your proper self, and, [14] seeking yourself, withdraw to the Vitality [15] that you will [16] see moving. And although it is [17] impossible for you to stand, fear [18] nothing; but if you [19] wish to stand, ascend [20] to the Existence, and you will [21] find it standing and [22] at rest after the likeness of the One [23] who is truly at rest [24] and embraces all these [25] silently and [26] inactively.

Having surpassed his active, earthly knowledge and inclining toward the passive knowledge of the "All higher than perfect" (the Triple-Powered One and the Invisible Spirit, XI 59,2-3), Allogenes then makes the ascent by a series of "withdrawals," attaining first the level of blessedness (i.e., Mentality). Next, as he "seeks himself," he ascends to and "stands" quietly at the supra-eidetic level of Vitality. Finally, at the level of Existence he is filled with a "primary revelation of the unknowable One" and empowered to receive an "incognizant knowledge" of the unknowable One.

> **XI 60** [14] There [15] was within me a stillness [16] of silence, and I heard the [17] Blessedness [18] whereby I knew <my> proper self. [19] And I withdrew to the [20] Vitality as I sought <myself>, and [21] I joined into it, [22] and I stood, [23] not firmly but [24] quietly. And I saw [25] an eternal, intellectual, undivided motion [26] that pertains to all the [27] powers, formless, unlimited [28] by limitation. And when [29] I wanted to stand firmly, [30] I ascended to [31] the Existence, which I found [32] standing and at rest [33] like an image and [34] likeness of that (tranquillity of the One) which [35] was upon me. By means of a revelation [36] of the Indivisible and the [37] Stable I was filled [38] with revelation. By means [39] of a primary revelation **61** [1] of the Unknowable One, [as if] [2] I were incognizant of him, I [knew] [3] him and was empowered by [4] him. Having been permanently strengthened, [5] I knew that [which] [6] exists in me, even the Triple-Powered One [7] and the revelation of [8] his uncontainableness. [And] [9] by means of a primary [10] revelation of the First One who is unknowable [11] to them all, the God [12] who is beyond perfection, I saw [13] him and the Triple-Powered One that exists [14] in them all. I was seeking [15] the ineffable [16] and unknowable God, [17] whom if one should [18] know him, one would be completely [19] incognizant of him.

The repeated emphasis on seeking and knowing oneself and what is within oneself indicates that the term "withdrawal" (ἀναχωρεῖν), while here translated as "ascent," in reality represents a kind of mental and spiritual implosion, as if Allogenes' ascent were actually a journey into his interior self where knower and known have become completely assimilated to one another.[17] There is no longer the distinction or contrast between knowing subject and known object that makes ordinary knowledge possible; one has passed into the realm of non-knowing knowledge.

Having assimilated himself to the primal modality of the Triple-Powered One which exists "in" him, Allogenes can no longer ascend to any higher level; only in the case that he becomes afraid can he further withdraw, and that only "backwards because of the (mental) activities" one risks in attempting to enjoy the fairness of this Faustian moment:

> **XI 59** [26] And when you receive [27] a revelation of him by [28] means of a primary revelation [29] of the Unknowable One— [30] of whom, should you [31] know him, you must be incognizant— [32] and you become [33] afraid in that place, [34] withdraw backwards because of the [35] activities. And when you become [36] perfect in that place, [37] still yourself. And [38] in accordance with the pattern that indwells [39] you, know likewise **60** [1] [that] it is this way among [all these beings,] [2] after this (same) pattern. And [3] [do not] further dissipate, [so that] [4] you may be able to stand, [5] and do not desire to be active, [6] [lest] you fall in any way [7] [from] the inactivity [in] [8] [you] of the Unknowable One. Do not [9] know him, for it is impossible; [10] but if by means of a [11] luminous thought you should know [12] him, be incognizant of him.

According to Plotinus, even Intellect's contemplation of the One involves a similar withdrawal from any proactive or aggressive intellection; it must, so to speak, return to its own original emanative phase as an indeterminate, primary vitality within the One itself:

> Rather, the Intellect must first return, so to speak, backwards, and give itself up, in a way, to what lies behind it (for it faces in both directions); and there, if it wishes to see that First Principle, it must not be altogether intellect. For it is the first life, since it is an activity manifest in the way of outgoing of all things; outgoing not in the sense that it is now in process of going out but that it has gone out. If, then, it is life and outgoing and holds all things distinctly and not in a vague general way—for [in the latter case] it would hold them imperfectly and inarticulately—it must itself derive from something else, which is no more in the way of outgoing, but is the origin of outgoing, and the origin of life and the origin of intellect and all things. (*Ennead* III, 8 [30] 9,29-40, trans. A. H. Armstrong).

17. Cf. Porphyry, *Sententiae* 40,51-56: "To those who are intellectually (νοερῶς) able to withdraw (χωρεῖν) into their own being (οὐσία) and to know it, and who, by both the knowledge itself and the consciousness (εἴδησις) of that knowledge, apprehend themselves according to a unity of knower and known, to those thus present to themselves, true being (τὸ ὄν) is also present."

For any determinate being, human or divine, true self-knowledge requires re-entry into its prefigurative, inchoate phase, thereby risking a certain abandonment of one's existence altogether:

> What then could the One be, and what nature could it have? There is nothing surprising in its being difficult to say, when it is not even easy to say what Being or Form is; but we do have a knowledge based upon the Forms. But in proportion as the soul goes towards the formless, since it is utterly unable to comprehend it because it is not delimited and, so to speak, stamped by a richly varied stamp, it slides away and is afraid that it may have nothing at all. Therefore it gets tired of this sort of thing, and often gladly comes down and falls away from all this, till it comes to the perceptible and rests there as if on solid ground; just as sight when it gets tired of small objects is glad to come upon big ones (cf. Numenius' comparison of the attempt to see the Good to one straining his eyes to catch sight of a little boat far away among the waves, frg. 2 des Places = 11 Leemans). But when the soul wants to see by itself, seeing only by being with it and being one by being one with it, it does not think that it yet has what it seeks, because it is not different from what is being thought. (*Ennead* VI, 9.3,1-13, trans. Armstrong).

In a state of utter passivity, Allogenes will go on to receive a "primary revelation of the Unknowable One" characterized as a cognitively vacant knowledge of the Unknowable One, a knowledge that can be articulated only by an extensive negative theology (XI 61,32-62,13; supplemented by a more affirmative theology, XI 62,14-67,20).

The sequence of Allogenes' mental states therefore moves from relative to permanent stability, and from self-knowledge to mental vacancy:

1. At the level of Mentality, characterized by silent stillness, he "hears" the Blessedness of true self-knowledge.
2. At the level of Vitality, characterized by the eternal circular ("undivided") motion of the supra-eidetic realm, and still seeking himself, he achieves partial stability.

3. At the level of Existence, characterized by total stability and inactivity, he achieves a complete stability, permanently strengthened by the indwelling of the Triple-Powered One.

The sequence of Allogenes' mental states is also the reverse of the sequence of the dominant phases or ontological modalities in which the Triple Powered One unfolds into the Aeon of Barbelo: Existence, Vitality, and Mentality. His initial state is called Blessedness, a condition associated with a determinate but silent (non-discursive?) self-contemplation characteristic of "Mentality," which also designates the terminal phase of the Triple-Powered One's three successive phases of Existence, Vitality, and Mentality. He is then instructed to move from this to a median but less stable state, that of "Vitality," which is characterized by an eternal circular motion that still includes an indeterminate "seeking of oneself." Then, in order to gain a state of ultimate incognizance beyond either determinate or indeterminate knowledge, he moves onward to the level of Existence, which is also the purely infinitival phase in which the Triple-Powered One is initially identical with the Invisible Spirit, who is absolutely at rest and contains all in total silence and inactivity. In each case, the contemplation of entities on ever higher ontological levels is characterized as a form of the contemplator's self-knowledge, suggesting that the consciousness of the knowing subject is actually assimilated to the ontological character of the level that one intelligizes at any given point. Having become inactive, still and silent, indeed incognizant even of himself, he has taken on the character of the Unknowable One, and is one with the object of his vision.

Allogenes' need to avoid positive activity of any sort has its analogue in the process by which the Triple-Powered One unfolds into the realms of being below it. In XI 53,10-18 it is said that the Triple-Powered One, like Aristotle's self-contemplating Unmoved Mover, "moved motionlessly in his governance, lest he sink into the boundless by means of another act of Mentality. He entered into himself and appeared, being all-encompassing." This seems to refer to the processing phase of the Triple-Powered One, whose emanation in the form of a boundless power from the Invisible Spirit has perhaps already achieved substantial existence as the Aeon of Barbelo in an act of contemplative reversion upon its source. Having achieved a stable state of effortless contemplation, to engage in a positive act of mentation would destabilize this effortlessness, and destroy its stable self-definition as the Aeon of Barbelo. Allogenes faces this same temptation.

D. *Marsanes*

The portion of the text devoted to Marsanes' description of the highest vision is severely damaged (X 14,21-18,14). Nevertheless, like Allogenes, Marsanes, now contemplatively dwelling in the Barbelo Aeon, yet in a sense still "[separate]" (X 14,20) from that Aeon, appears to take on the character of its "unbegotten" denizens, and is then able to see for himself the three powers of the Triple Powered One just as Barbelo saw them in the course of her own emanation:

> **X 14** [15] I [was dwelling] [16] among the aeons that were [17] generated. As I was permitted, [I] [18] came to be among those that were un[begotten]. [19] But I was dwelling in the [great] [20] Aeon (of Barbelo), although I [was separate from it]. [21] And [I saw] [22] [the] three powers [of] [23] the Triple [Powered] One. [24] The [first (third?)] [25] [power ...] [26] and [...] [27] [...] [28] [...] [29] [...] **15** [1] [... the] Silent One and the [2] Triple Powered One, [(and) *the One* (i.e., the Spirit)] [3] that does not have breath. [4] We took our stand [...] [5] [...] we [contemplated] ... [13] we entered ...

Marsanes' commentary on this particular vision occurs on pages 16 and 17, which are almost totally obliterated. To judge from the fragmentary phrases "why is there no knowledge [among the] ignorant" (X 17,2-3) and "he runs the risk" (X 17,4), this vision may have involved an application of the principle of "learned ignorance" so prominent in *Allogenes*.

It is interesting to note that in *Marsanes*, the actions of contemplative withdrawal, standing, and silence are said to constitute the very process by which the Aeon of Barbelo itself came into being (see X 9,1-16, cited in Chapter 12, p. 522). While the directionality of Barbelo's emergence is downward through these three powers, the directionality of the human contemplator's movement is upward. Despite its fragmentary condition, the extant text of *Marsanes* (X 15,4-16,3) seems to have reported that Marsanes (in the company of unnamed companions—"we") stood, contemplated and entered these same powers, and presumably came to participate in the first and highest of the Triple Powered One's three powers, the Invisible Spirit, "[... the Spirit that] does not have breath (πνοή)" who "exists in [unknowability]."

V. The Final Contemplation of the Supreme Principles

The final contemplative vision is represented rather differently in each of the Platonizing Sethian treatises, but seems in general to be characterized in terms of negativity, abstraction, and absence of motion, otherness, or determinate content; there is only ineffability, tranquillity, and silence.

A. The *Three Steles of Seth*

Although the *Three Steles of Seth* contains a doxology directed to the supreme unknowable One, there is no description of any union with it beyond the concluding rubric's description of the highest phase of ascent being characterized as silence (VII 127,6-26).

B. *Zostrianos*

In both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, the highest form of divine knowledge is revealed by the "Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo." In *Zostrianos*, the content of the Luminaries' revelation is a lengthy two-part disquisition on the realms extending from the ultimate principle down to the Aeon of Autogenes: the first part on the nature of the ultimate, unitary source of all, the Invisible Spirit, his Triple Powers and the manner in which the Aeon of Barbelo emanates from these (VIII 64,13-96,3), and the second part (after 16 pages of damaged and unreconstructable text, VIII 96,20-113,14) on the deployment and content of the Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes Aeons (VIII 113,14-128,18).

The first part of the revelation begins with a lengthy negative theology devoted to the supreme Invisible Spirit, and is comprised of lengthy negative theologies of the sort found at the beginning of the *Apocryphon of John* and in the various Middle Platonic apophatic sources discussed in association with Alcinous' *Didaskalikos* in Chapter 9. It draws upon a negative and positive theological source—cited and discussed in the first part of Chapter 12—that was shared nearly word-for-word between Marius Victorinus' *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-50,21 and *Zostrianos* VIII 64,13-75,21 (with an admixture of the author's own commentary in VIII 67,4-75,14). Undoubtedly this source was based upon some kind of Middle Platonic commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, apparently an interpretation of its first hypothesis (137C-142A).

The portion of these revelations bearing on the ultimate knowledge of the supreme principles is the negative theology in VIII 64,13b-66,14a, according to which the supreme Spirit is known by three the approaches discussed in Chapter 11: 1) by conceptually abstracting from him all qualities since no quality applies to him—the *via negativa*; 2) by conceptualizing him to be prior to every principle, concept or power—the *via eminentiae*; and 3) by conceptualizing him to transcend pairs of contraries—the method of the synthesis of opposites. In short, the Spirit is beyond conceptualization altogether, although in a paradoxical way, he is the whole of truly existing things (the sum of the determinate reality that owes its being to him), and yet he is none of them.

This negative theology concludes with the following cryptic remarks on its implications for salvation; the emphasis on wholeness, indivisibility, and ineffability clearly conveys the non-discursive character of supreme knowledge of the divine:

> **VIII 68** [14] Blessed is the [Idea] [15] of the activity that exists! [16] By receiving Existence [17] it receives potential [for] [18] perfection. Since it never [19] divides, it is then [20] perfect. Therefore, [21] it is perfect [22] because it is not divisible [23] with itself. [24] For nothing exists [25] before it except [26] [the perfect] unity (*69 to 72 uninscribed*) **73** [1] [that is its] Existence, [2] [since] it is salvation [for] [3] [the wholes]. And he [of whom] [4] it is [not] even possible or [fitting] [5] [to speak], if one [6] [affirms] him for himself, all such things [7] [will eventuate], for he [who] [8] [abides] in the Existence [9] [of] this one [10] [exists] in every way in Life; by [11] Blessedness he knows; and [12] if he participates in the [13] [wholes], he is perfect. [14] But if he participates in [15] [two] or one, he is of the sort [16] that he has participated.

The negative theology is supplemented by a brief exposition of the triple powers of the Spirit (VIII 66,14-75,11): Existence, Vitality, and Blessedness or Mentality. Just as these modes of the Spirit's phases of sole self-existence, self-expression through vital overflowing, and self-determination of that overflow by an act of self-knowledge give rise to an ideal transcendent realm of true being, so also, by receiving these powers of the spirit through the baptismal waters, an enlightened human being can mentally replicate these phases in the reverse direction, moving from a determinate knowledge of defined being to an indeterminate, less stable but temporary phase of self-seeking, climaxing in a total loss of determinate selfhood and a corresponding assimilation to the ultimate stability of absolute unity and solitary existence.

After some severely damaged section with some missing pages (VIII 89-112), the revelation of the Luminaries draws to a close with a lengthy revelation of the character of the Kalyptos Aeon and a briefer treatment of the Aeons of Protophanes and Autogenes. At the end of their lengthy revelation, Zostrianos, even though he has heard things unknown even to the gods, raises yet another set of questions relating to the nature of the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit. But the Luminaries depart without saying anything more. Zostrianos is then brought before Protophanes, where he blesses the Aeon of Kalyptos, the virginal Barbelo and the Invisible Spirit. Thereupon he is inscribed in glory, receives a perfect crown and begins his descent back to earth.

C. *Allogenes*

Like *Zostrianos*, the final third of *Allogenes* is devoted to the revelation from the Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo. As if to distinguish it from the foregoing revelations of Youel, which are of a largely positive and kataphatic nature, this revelation is called a "primary revelation" and is largely negative and apophatic in character (XI 60,14-61,22, cited above, p. 661). The extensive negative theology that follows exhibits a close relationship between the negative ontological predications of the Invisible Spirit and the non-cognitive contemplation of him (XI 61,32-62,13; as in *Zostrianos*, this is supplemented by a more positive theology in XI 62,14-67,20). The Invisible Spirit is said to be known by conceptually abstracting from him all qualities since no quality applies to him and by conceptualizing him to be prior to, more than, or greater than any conceivable entity no matter how exalted. The supreme One has neither this character nor its opposite, but transcends both in a way that one cannot comprehend. In short, the Spirit is beyond conceptualization altogether, yet he is paradoxically the whole of truly existing things while being none of them. Since the Spirit is beyond being, so also he is beyond any kind of cognition, and therefore he is "known" by not knowing him. We will return to this feature of *Allogenes* below under the theme "learned ignorance."

D. *Marsanes*

At the conclusion of Marsanes' account of his ascent through the "thirteen seals," he reports that through "him"—presumably the Invisible Spirit—he saw the absolutely supreme principle of all, "the [great unknowable Power]," the Unknown Silent One:

> **X 16** [3] And [through] him (the Invisible Spirit?) I saw [4] the great [5] [unknowable power (the Unknown Silent One)].

In contrast to *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, in *Marsanes* there is no direct evidence of negative theological predications of the highest realities. Moreover, it is unclear whether Marsanes, although he certainly *sees* the three powers of the Triple Powered One and *sees* the supreme Unknown Silent One, is actually assimilated to those realities in quite the same way as was Allogenes. Indeed, Marsanes' vision of the supreme Unknown Silent One seems to be mediated "through" the Invisible Spirit, and it may be that Marsanes is at this point still "dwelling in" the Barbelo Aeon (although "[separate from it]," X 14,19-20).

VI. Comparison of the Contemplative Ascents

A. Intracorporeal and Extracorporeal Vision and Revelation

In the Platonic tradition generally, vision of the divine involves an ascent of the soul beyond the confines of the body, whose urges and needs distract one's mental concentration. Thus Porphyry (*Vita Plotini* 23) reports of Plotinus that he was "sleeplessly alert," and "labored strenuously to free himself and rise above the bitter waves of this blood-drenched life: and this is why to Plotinus—God-like and lifting himself often, by the ways of meditation and by the methods Plato teaches in the *Symposium*, to the first and all-transcendent God—that God appeared." As Plotinus put it (*Ennead* I, 2 [19] 5,5), "the soul collects itself in a sort of place of its own away from the body and is wholly unaffected by it." According to *Corpus Hermeticum* X, vision of the divine suppresses the body and sensation while raising the soul out of the body:

> Asclepius: "Yes, but the vision of the good is not like the ray of the sun which, because it is fiery, dazzles the eyes with light and makes them shut. On the contrary, it illuminates to the extent that one capable of receiving the influence of intellectual splendor can receive it. It probes more sharply, but it does no harm, and it is full of all immortality. [5] Those able to drink somewhat more deeply of the vision often fall asleep, moving out of the body toward a sight most fair, just as it happened to Ouranos and Kronos, our ancestors."
>
> Tat: "Would that we, too, could see it, father."

> Asclepius "Indeed, my child, would that we could. But we are still too weak now for this sight; we are not yet strong enough to open our mind's eyes and look on the incorruptible, incomprehensible beauty of that good. In the moment when you have nothing to say about it, you will see it, for the knowledge of it is divine silence and suppression of all the senses. [6] One who has understood it can understand nothing else, nor can one who has looked on it look on anything else or hear of anything else, nor can he move his body in any way. He stays still, all bodily senses and motions forgotten. Having illuminated all his mind, this beauty kindles his whole soul and by means of body draws it upward, and beauty changes his whole person into essence. For when soul has looked on the beauty of the good, my child, it cannot be deified while in a human body." (*CH* X 4,21-6,4 Nock-Festugière, trans. Copenhaver)

Since only the conclusion of the *Three Steles of Seth* contains the briefest reference to the procedure of the contemplative ascent, the following discussion of the loci of visionary and revelatory experiences will be limited to *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes*. Both Allogenes and Zostrianos are quite clear that the ascent is ultimately an extracorporeal one: both leave their bodies behind on earth as they are elevated in a luminous vehicle, Zostrianos by means of a luminous cloud and Allogenes by means of an eternal light-garment placed upon him. On the other hand, since Marsanes merely highlights facets of his ascent rather than fully narrating it, it is difficult to tell whether his visions and experiences occurred in or out of his earthly body.

After he had received all the revelations from Youel and had completed a "hundred year" period of preparation culminating in a vision of all the levels of the Aeon of Barbelo, Allogenes received a "luminous" garment by which he was taken up to "a pure place." Thereupon, he again experienced a vision of the contents of the Barbelo Aeon by means of a great "Blessedness" (XI 58,34-59,1.10-13), a term that denotes a discursive knowledge of one's true self as a form of intellect that enjoys complete affinity with the divine intellect, the Barbelo Aeon. However, this form of knowledge is soon superseded when Allogenes "stands at rest upon," that is, transcends even his self-knowledge and inclines to a higher form of knowing. At this stage, Allogenes has not completely transcended discursive knowledge, since he is still aware of multiplicity, but he is now ready for certain "holy powers" to be revealed to him by the "Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo" to encourage him to "strive for" an even higher—non-discursive—knowledge toward which he had already "inclined," namely "the knowledge of the Universal Ones," that is, of the Triple-Powered One and the Invisible Spirit (XI 59,2-3).

In the case of Zostrianos, while still in this world, he is able to reject the materialistic life, discover the limitations of the traditional religious answers, reject the influence of the ruler of the perceptible world, strengthen his inner intellectual spirit so as to awaken from dark sleep, find his paternal God, and receive a "holy spirit" enabling him to see the "perfect Child." Then he begins to ponder the origin of multiplicity from original unity and seek a place of repose for his spirit beyond the perceptible world. These initial this-worldly preparations culminate in the sudden appearance of the angel of knowledge and the luminous cloud that effect his transference from this world to the other world and his step-by-step ascent through the transcendent realms of true being. Ascending through various aeonic levels, Zostrianos undergoes various ontic transformations as he receives revelations from Ephesech, Youel, and the Luminaries.

On the other hand, Allogenes is clothed with light only after he has already received the revelations of Youel, and immediately thereafter receives the revelation from the Luminaries. In both treatises, revelations from Youel form the immediate prelude to the revelation from the Luminaries: *Zostrianos* places this revelation as fourth in a sequence of revealers (the angel of knowledge, Authrounios, Ephesech, then Youel), while in *Allogenes*, Youel is apparently the first and only revealer figure encountered by Allogenes before his culminating revelation from the Luminaries. And finally, while Zostrianos ascends only to the mid-point of the Barbelo Aeon, Allogenes ascends beyond the Barbelo Aeon through the three levels of the Triple Powered One, whereupon he receives an even higher "primary revelation."

The similarities and dissimilarities between the ascent narratives in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* are instructive. Both Allogenes and Zostrianos receive revelation while still in their earthly bodies, Zostrianos seeing visions of the perfect Child as well as an appearance of the angel of knowledge, and Allogenes receiving revelations—of a distinctly higher level—from Youel. Both Allogenes and Zostrianos leave their bodies behind on earth as they are elevated in a luminous vehicle, Zostrianos by means of a luminous cloud and Allogenes by means of an eternal light-garment placed upon him. Both Allogenes and Zostrianos undergo lengthy periods of preparation, Zostrianos for an unspecified period of

"daily" philosophical meditations (VIII 3,14-19) prior to the appearance of the angel of knowledge and Allogenes for a "hundred years" between the revelations of Youel and his revelation from the Luminaries. Both visionaries receive the highest revelation from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon, and in both treatises, this revelation (called a "primary revelation" in *Allogenes*) begins with an extensive negative theology—followed by a less extensive positive theology—of the supreme deity, the Invisible Spirit. While in *Allogenes* this revelation is confined to the nature of the supreme deity, in *Zostrianos*, on the other hand, it goes on to treat the emanation of the Barbelo Aeon and the nature and contents of its three subaeons, Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes.

On the other hand, it is unclear whether Marsanes—since he never narrates his ascent, but only reveals the things he saw and understood after the fact—left his body behind on earth. He tells the reader he has "confirmed" the thirteenth seal and the limit of knowledge (X 2,12-15), that he has "contemplated" that which truly exists (X 4,24-25), that he has "known" the corruption of the sensible realm and the immortality of the intelligible realm (X 5,14-17), that he has "attained the boundary" of the sensible and incorporeal realm (X 5,17-21), "sought," "inquired," and "perceived" the nature and function of the Triple Powered One (X 6,17-7,3), and sensed the powers' silent praise of the Barbelo Aeon, whom he too would "contemplate" and approach (X 8,12-23). As a result, he "received" the third power of the Triple Powered One (X 10,7-11). All of this could have been achieved while still in the body.

But when the Barbelo Aeon itself issues the invitation to "ascend above" with the Invisible Spirit (X 10,12-27), Marsanes goes on to say he came to dwell in the Barbelo Aeon—although remaining "[separate from it]"—where he saw the Triple Powered One, had "taken his stand" and seen the supreme Unknown Silent One (X 14,15-16,5). Again after many years, he saw and came to know the "[Father]."

The lengthy section on the configurations of the soul and the astral world likewise specifies no particular location for the observer of these phenomena, although one may presume that it was earthly. On the other hand, in Marsanes' concluding apocalyptic vision on the destiny of souls—although the text is uncertain—he is apparently "[attended]" by angels and "[guided]" by Gamaliel (X 45,22-68,17), which does seem to imply an out-of-the-body experience of some sort.

On balance, one is tempted to resolve this ambiguity in favor of an intracorporeal ascent, bearing in mind that the author sees no epistemological advantage to either intracorporeal or extracorporeal contemplation, since either condition is of no advantage to the sinner:

> **X 41** [18] They did not understand them (Marsanes' discourses), namely the embodied [19] souls upon [20] the earth, as well as those outside of [21] the body, who are in heaven, [22] more numerous than the angels.

The apostle Paul reported a similar ambiguity concerning his own heavenly ascent in 2 Cor 12:1-4:

> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

While the case of *Marsanes* is not altogether clear, it is clear that both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* distinguish between two levels of knowing, one achievable in this world, the other in the other world. While he is still in this world, Zostrianos' revelatory experiences include only the vision of the perfect Child (with no explicit auditory revelation) and his initial encounter with the angel of knowledge who merely informs him of his elect status and destiny as a proclaimer of revelation yet to be received. Thus in *Zostrianos*, all true knowledge of transcendent reality is received only when the recipient has been transported to the other world.

Allogenes clearly distinguishes these two levels of knowing. While still in this world, one may attain knowledge of the determinate realm of pure being—albeit with the assistance of an envoy from the other world (Youel)—knowledge sufficient for a vision of the beings comprising the Aeon of Barbelo up to and including the lower aspect of the Triple-Powered One. But only after one has escaped one's earthly confines and risen to a "pure place" in the other world can one experience the indeterminate realities that lie beyond the realm of determinate being, through an apophatic "primary revelation" imparted by revealers residing at its summit (the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon).

B. The Sources of Divine Knowledge

Among the Platonizing Sethian treatises, there are various sources from which the knowledge of transcendent reality is gained. Except for the figure of Gamaliel in the concluding apocalyptic vision concerning the destiny of souls, *Marsanes* neither invokes nor mentions any revealer other than the Barbelo Aeon itself as the source of Marsanes' visions or knowledge of the divine world. On the other hand, the visions of Zostrianos and Allogenes are each prefaced by instruction from a revealer figure.

In *Zostrianos*, Zostrianos' acts of vision are always responses to an external stimulus such as the receipt of a "holy spirit" (VIII 2,5-14), an auditory revelation (from Authrounios or Ephesech or Youel), or a celestial baptism, or else follow directly upon being escorted by a revealer like Youel into the presence of an object of vision. While his actual visions and reflections are entirely self-actualized, throughout his ascent, Zostrianos is continually escorted by these revealers, who "bring him before" certain figures such as the Triple Male Child and Protophanes, where his ascent terminates.

In the case of Allogenes' ascent, the pattern is different; the two revealers, Youel and the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon do not actually escort or guide Allogenes in his ascent, but merely explain to him what he is about to see, whereupon his actual visions of the Barbelo Aeon after his hundred-year preparation are apparently unattended. Likewise, Allogenes' ascent beyond the Aeon of Barbelo through the levels of the Triple Powered One to the Unknowable One (XI 60,12-61,22) is unattended even though it occurs as a response to the revelation by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon (XI 59,4-60,12).

Finally, except for the concluding apocalyptic vision where he is escorted by various angels, including Gamaliel, Marsanes' ascent to the supreme deity is unescorted, and the only transcendental being to make direct verbal revelation to him is the Aeon of Barbelo; in all other instances, his knowledge and experience of the transcendental realm seem to be the product of his own questions and reflections.

It appears that all three visionaries undergo some more or less lengthy period of preparation prior to their ascent into and—in the cases of Allogenes and Marsanes—beyond the Barbelo Aeon. Zostrianos engages in an unspecified period of "daily" philosophical meditations (VIII 3,14-28) prior to the appearance of the angel of knowledge, and Allogenes

prepares himself for a "hundred years" (XI 56,15-58,26) between his initial vision of the Barbelo Aeon (following the revelations of Youel) and his ascent through the Triple Powered One to the supreme Invisible Spirit (following the revelation from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon). Even Marsanes concludes the account of his visionary ascent with an apparent—but obscure—reference to the temporal extent of the period during which he experienced its various stages:[18]

> **X 18** [1] [Now] these [are the images that I] [2] saw in the nine [cosmic] [3] hebdomads [4] [that are] in a [single eternal] day. ... And [again after] [15] many [years, as for me], [16] when I saw the [Father (?) I came to] [17] know him, and [...]

At the beginning of the section on the nomenclature of the cosmic powers and the shapes of the soul, he also alludes to the fact that his coming to know the "[Father]" involved a period of "many years" (X 18,14-17), reminding one of the "one hundred years" of Allogenes' preparation prior to his vision of the Barbelo Aeon or of Zostrianos' period — apparently lengthy though of unspecified extent—of daily pondering and searching prior to his own ascent into the Barbelo Aeon. It is also significant that both Zostrianos and Allogenes receive the highest revelation from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon, while the sole recorded verbal revelation to Marsanes is uttered directly by the Barbelo Aeon.

C. Vision and Audition as Revelatory Media

Both *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* contain commentary on the techniques that lead most directly to fulfilling their main function of spiritual enlightenment. For both treatises, the media of communication between this world and the other world that convey knowledge of the divine are both auditory and visual. Audition functions as a preparation for initiation into a higher state, which in turn is only fulfilled in an act of silent vision; in Allogenes, however, even this needs supplementation by the hearing of a final kataphatic "primary revelation."

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18. The cryptic phraseology may mean that his vision culminated in his sixty third year (9 × 7), reputed to be the most critical "climacteric" stage (κλιμακτήρ) in a man's life, here said to be experienced as a single eternal day. Ages from 49 through 81 that were divisible by 9 (symbolizing the soul) and/or 7 (symbolizing the body) were considered most vulnerable or auspicious; see A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1899), 526-531, esp. 528, n. 2.

While in this world prior to his ascent, Zostrianos receives visions of the perfect Child (VIII 2,9-24) and hears the initial message of awakening from the angel of knowledge (VIII 3,28-4,19). Once the ascent is underway, his visions and auditions are exclusively otherworldly. On the basis of his own human experience, the author has become aware of the difficulties involved in the proper understanding of multitudes of names and powers such as those he has heard invoked in the Sethian baptismal cult; it then occurs to him that perhaps they all refer to same ultimate source of salvation:

> **VIII 7** [22] Then I sought [23] [a single power belonging to these (powers presiding over celestial baptism)]. I spoke [24] [these words, saying]: "I [25] [...] of [26] [... and] I [27] [was asking] him [about] the [28] [conception of these]: why [are there] [29] [differences] in the ability [that hears] [30] them differently in human auditions? **8** [1] [Are these same ones] their [2] powers? Or are these things the same [3] but their names differ from one another? Does [4] soul differ from soul? [5] Why are human beings different [6] from one another? How and to what extent [7] are they human?"

The "single power belonging to all these" (the beings residing in the Four Lights) is Autogenes, the figure who in the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia* establishes the Four Lights in their respective aeons as dwellings for the archetypal protoplasts Adamas, Seth, and his seed. Zostrianos seems especially concerned about the names of the beings he has just praised in the course of his first four baptisms (a theme that returns in the first part of Ephesech's revelation in VIII 13,15b-44,22a): what is the nature of the names of these powers, how are the names related to their nature and functions, and why are they heard differently by different human beings?

But Authrounios counters that such things must be understood by verbal revelation before any higher understanding is possible ("[Neither a revelation] nor a [command appears] to you, [even from the] Invisible [Spirit, until you know these things]," VIII 8,20-21). But once Authrounios has verbally explained the roles of Sophia and the Archon in the creation of this world, Zostrianos reports that he has not only heard, but has seen these realities:

> **VIII 10** [20] When [I heard these things and when] [21] I saw [them, I was able to understand] [22] the mind of [these who set their mind] [23] upon the things they do not [know].

In a similar fashion, after Youel's second revelation, Allogenes' wisdom has become complete, having known the Good within him. He is now ready to *hear* things about the Triple Powered One that he must guard in great *silence* and mystery, "because they are not spoken to anyone except those who are worthy, those who are able to *hear*" (XI 52,15-25). At the end of her third revelation, Allogenes *sees* the glories in the Barbelo Aeon, but is still able to know only *the fact that* the Triple Powered One exists even beyond them (XI 55,12-22), while perfect *comprehension* is impossible. But on completion of Youel's revelations of the Barbelo Aeon and the Triple Powered One and just prior to his otherworldly ascent, Allogenes reports that he was able to *see* the glories of the Barbelo Aeon:

> **XI 55** [12] [Now after I] heard these things, I [13] [saw the glories] of the [perfect] individuals [14] [and] the all-perfect ones [15] [who are unified], even the [16] [all-perfect ones who] are before the [17] [perfect ones.

This experience is repeated immediately after his own elevation into the other world:

> **XI 58** [26] When I was taken [27] by the eternal light, [28] by [29] the garment that was upon [30] me, and was taken up to [31] a pure place whose [32] likeness cannot be [33] revealed in the world, [34] then by means of a [35] great Blessedness I [36] saw all those about whom I had [37] heard. And I [38] praised them all and I **59** [1] [stood at rest] upon my knowledge and [I] [2] inclined to the Knowledge [of] [3] the Universal Ones, the Barbelo-Aeon.

In *Zostrianos*, once Authrounios has explained the origin of the sensible cosmos, the revealer Ephesech appears, and Zostrianos continues to ask about the multitude of names and waters into which he has been baptized:

> **VIII 13** [15] [I said,] "I am seeking after the [16] water: [So how does] it perfect and give [17] [its power]? What are [its] powers, [18] [the names] in which we receive baptism? [19] [Why are] these names [20] [different than those?] And why [21] [are the waters different] from one [22] [another? And are they complete] in the ... [23] [... from] others [24] [...] humans [25] [... Why are they different] [26] [in this way from one another]?"

Ephesech explains that the multitude of baptismal powers, waters, and names are ultimately reducible to the three powers of the Triple Powered One that have appeared from a single unity; the baptismal waters are these powers:

> **VIII 15** [4] It is the water of Life that [5] belongs to Vitality in which you now [6] have been baptized in the Autogenes. [7] It is the [water] of Blessedness [8] that [belongs] to Knowledge in which you [9] will be [baptized] in the Protophanes. [10] It is the water of Existence [11] [which] belongs to Divinity, that is, [12] to Kalyptos.

The baptismal names are the λόγοι of these powers, the means by which transcendent reality is able to enter and come into contact with physical, sensible things and give them shape:

> **VIII 17** [1] And the power exists together with the [2] Essence and the Existence [3] of Being, while this water exists. [4] And the name in which one is baptized [5] is a rational expression (λόγος) of this water.

The author of *Zostrianos* theorizes on the role of speech and audition in the matter of the names invoked in the course of transcendental baptism: they are called rational expressions (λόγοι) of the essence of things that are stable and truly exist without change, that is, archetypal ideas and forms. The problem seems to be that, in the context of the traditional baptismal rite, the names that serve as the principle (Logos) by which one is shaped according to one's true genus seem to be present to us only by speaking and hearing the names. As a result, we miss their significance and power, and take them for granted ("as they are able to receive them"). Reliance on mere sensation and reasoning is not enough; it is better than mere materiality, but falls short of an intellectual insight into the nature of the names by which we come to know the unified genus they confer upon us. Arguing along Platonic lines,[19] *Zostrianos* regards the mere auditory communication of revelation as ultimately insufficient for true enlightenment, for the names invoked in the rite still belong to the audible—and thus to the corporeal and sensible—sphere;

19. In Platonic metaphysics, a Logos is that aspect of transcendent reality that is able to enter and come into contact with physical, sensible things and give them shape. The notion that names are the physical manifestation of a Logos that conveys true being is evident in the *Cratylus* (425D1-4 and 439B6-8), where Plato maintains that names reveal the nature of their objects by actually imitating them in sound, although it is necessary to go beyond them and study the things in themselves: "That objects should be imitated (μεμιμημένα) in letters and syllables, and so find expression (κατάδηλα γινόμενα), may appear ridiculous, Hermogenes, but it cannot be avoided—there is no better principle to which we can look for the truth of primal names (ἀληθείας τῶν πρώτων ὀνόματων).... But we may admit so much, that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names; rather they must be studied and investigated in themselves (αὐτὰ ἐξ' αὐτῶν)."

they need to be transcended by intellectual insight, a kind of vision or contemplative seeing of just the sort performed by the transcendental aeons upon their own original emanation. One must come to see the likeness that exists between one's archetypal genus in the intelligible realm and its expression in individual things; the genus is indeed intrinsic to them although it actually exists in the intelligible realm.

> **VIII 25** [10] (There is) the path [11] into the Self-generated ones, the one [12] in which you have now been baptized each [13] time, which is appropriate for seeing the [perfect] [14] individuals—it is a knowledge [15] of everything, having originated [16] from the powers of the Self-generated ones. [17] (There is) the one you will perform when you transfer [18] to the all-perfect aeons. [19] When you wash in the third [20] baptism, [then] you will hear [21] about those [that] truly [exist] [22] in [that] place. Now concerning [these] names, [23] they are like this: [24] there is a unity, [and it is a single genus] [25] like [things that are perfect] [26] by virtue of [coming into being among] [27] things that are, and [they have come into being because] [28] there is a rational expression of them [and because] **26** [1] it is a name that truly exists [2] [as] they do. Now [3] on the one hand existing things exist [4] in an intellection similar to them, and one's [5] generic similarity is innate in one's own individuality; [6] on the other hand, an individual sees, understands, [7] enters, and [8] becomes like it (his genus) by audible [9] speaking and hearing. [10] But by (mere) hearing they are powerless, because they [11] are sensible and corporeal. [12] Therefore they take [13] things as they are able to receive them. [14] It is a [faint] image [15] arising like this [16] from sensation or reasoning, [17] superior to material nature [18] but inferior to the intellectual [19] essence.

Baptism into the waters of Autogenes signifies or enables a recognition of the reality of individual souls and ideal forms of individual things:

> **VIII 17** [6] Therefore the first perfect water of [7] the Triple Powered One, <that of> Autogenes, [8] [is] Life for the perfect souls, [9] for it is a rational expression of [10] the perfect god's creativity .... [15] [But] he who simultaneously knows [16] [how he exists] and what [17] [the] living [water is], [18] [such a one] lives within [19] [knowledge. That which belongs to knowledge] is the [20] [water of] Vital[ity]. And in [21] [becoming, Life] becomes [limitless] [22] [that it may receive] its [own Being].

Baptism into the waters of Protophanes signifies or enables an ability to recognize the undifferentiated unity that characterizes individual souls and ideal forms:

> **VIII 22** [4] And [5] the universal intelligence joins in [6] when the [7] water of Autogenes is complete. [8] When one knows it and [9] all these, one has to do

with the [10] water of Protophanes; when [11] one unites with him and all these, [12] one has to do with Kalyptos.

Baptism into the waters of Kalyptos signifies or enables an ability to recognize the absolute unity and single source of all souls and all ideal realities:

> **VIII 23** [6] And if one understands their [7] origin, [8] how they are all manifest in [9] a single principle, and how [10] all who are joined come to [11] be divided, and how those [12] who were divided join [13] again, and how the parts [14] [join with] the wholes and the [15] species with the [genera]—when [16] one understands these things—one has washed [17] in the baptism of Kalyptos.

The objective, visionary progression from Autogenes to Protophanes to Kalyptos to the Invisible Spirit is an increasing participation in eternity and a continual refinement of the soul towards unity and simplicity (VIII 23,17b-24,1). The objects of one's vision become completely internalized in the form of their powers or attributes, so that there is in fact nothing "outside" of one; one moves from having a "portion" to having the totality of the eternal ones as multiplicity is dialectically and contemplatively resolved into unity.[20]

In VIII 24,2-17a Ephesech goes on to clarify the correlation between the ascending series of the objects of ones' vision and the epistemological progression enabled through the subjective revelatory experiences of hearing, seeing, and intelligizing, although not a hearing of the normal sort:

> **VIII 24** [2] On the one hand, with perfect soul he [sees] those [3] of the Autogenic ones; with Intellect, [4] those of the Triple Male; with [5] Holy Spirit, those of the Protophanic [6] ones. On the other hand, He hears about Kalyptos [7] through the powers of the Spirit from whom they [8] have come forth in a far superior [9] revelation of the Invisible [10] Spirit. And by means of the thought [11] which now exists in silence and [12] within the First Thought, (he hears) about the Triple [13] Powered Invisible Spirit; it [14] is, moreover, an audition and a silent power [15] purified with life-giving Spirit, [16] the perfect, [first] perfect, [17] and all-perfect one.

20. According to Alcinous (*Didaskalikos* IV.7,12-17, interpreting *Timaeus* 28A2), in the human realm, intellection discerns the primary intelligibles with a certain "comprehension" or "embrace" and not in succession (Τὰ μὲν δὲ πρῶτα νοητὰ νόησις κρίνει οὐκ ἄνευ τοῦ ἐπιστημονικοῦ λόγου, περιλήψει τινὶ καὶ οὐ διεξόδῳ).

Thus one is baptized in the waters of Autogenes and one sees the waters of Protophanes, but one may only "hear" of Kalyptos by a "far superior revelation" (perhaps something like the "command" of the *Three Steles of Seth* or the "primary revelation" leading to incognizant knowledge in *Allogenes*); of the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit, one only gets an "audition and a silent power." Immersion in the three baptismal waters enables one to *see* the realities associated with Autogenes, the Triple Male Child, and Protophanes by means of the respective faculties of Soul, Intellect and Spirit. On the other hand—as indeed turns out to be the case for Zostrianos himself—the realities associated with Kalyptos may only be *heard* through revelatory discourse emanating from a "far superior revelation of the Invisible Spirit" later delivered by the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon (VIII 64,7b-96,3), just as is the case in the "primary revelation" of *Allogenes* (XI 61,22b-69,1 which reveals not Kalyptos, but the supreme Unknowable One). However, the reality associated with the Invisible Spirit is apprehended neither by sight nor audible revelation, but only by an "audition and silent power" or faculty of *thought*, a form of audition beyond hearing, which is identical to the "pure silent power" that exists in Barbelo, the silent Forethought (πρόνοια) of the Invisible Spirit which emanates as Barbelo, his First Thought (πρωτέννοια).

This silent thought and audition of which *Zostrianos* speaks is rather close, but not identical to *Allogenes*' doctrine of the non-knowing knowledge by which the Invisible Spirit is to be apprehended, since it is still conceived as *thought*. However, the audition of which it speaks is not an act of perception *per se*, since it is silent. The metaphor of audition is rather meant to convey the passivity of *hearing* rather than the more dominantly active character of *seeing*. It is thus the *passivity* of knowing the divine that is common to these two treatises, the one conceiving it as a silent audition, and the other as non-cognizant cognition.

It is interesting to note that this progression from audition to vision to silent thought is nearly the reverse order of the modes by which the Mother Barbelo reveals herself in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. As the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit, she exists properly as silence, but reveals herself in successively more articulate modes or communicative media: from an indistinct Sound, to perceptible Speech, and finally appearing as the Logos who conveys the living water (XIII 36,1-3; 37,20-30; 46,11-25).

D. Discursive versus Intuitive Knowledge of the Divine

It appears that all the Platonizing Sethian treatises assume two levels of knowing.

The first level is an active and discursive knowledge of oneself and of the realm of incorporeal but determinate being in the Barbelo Aeon, as well as an awareness of the unknowable principles beyond it. It also includes the ability to experience one's assimilation to the various levels comprising the intellectual and psychic realm of the Barbelo Aeon. Such self-knowledge is the means by which one realizes one's essential divinity, but so long as it remains a positive, active knowledge, the contemplative intellect can go no further. From this point forward, further insight is achieved only by a suppression, not only of positive knowledge, but of any sort of mental activity whatsoever.

Strictly speaking, the second level of knowing is not knowing at all, but a kind of passive and non-discursive intuition or vision with no awareness of multiplicity or distinctions, even that between knower and known, an utter vacancy of the cognitive intellect, a "learned ignorance" (XI 59,30-35; 60,5-12; 61,1-4) which *Allogenes* calls an incognizant "primary revelation of the Unknowable One" (XI 59,28-29; 60,39-61,1). It is best described in negative, apophatic terms. While *Zostrianos* seems to have no specific term by which it identifies this knowledge, the *Three Steles of Seth* seems to call it a "command" from the pre-existent One, and *Marsanes* generally calls it "silence," or perhaps even a "command to be silent," since it speaks of the Triple Powered One as "the Perfect One who is silent, [who has] this [commandment (ἐντολή)] to be silent" (X 9,13-16).

Much as in Plato's *Timaeus* (53D), according to which the ultimate constituents of the physical realm may be known by thought, "but the principles yet more remote than these are known only to God and to whomever of men is a friend of God," the highest realities can only be revealed to one who is familiar to the divine, and even then known by knowing what they are not, known by not knowing them. Of course, Both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*—given their apocalyptic genre—presuppose that any sort of enlightenment requires divine initiative and guidance. Nevertheless, on balance, in its focus on coordination of cognitive approaches with ontological levels, *Allogenes* conforms more to the Platonic philosophical program of dialectical enlightenment as laid out in the *Republic* and *Symposium* discussed in Chapter 11, while *Zostrianos*, in its focus on descriptive and declarative knowledge of the contents of such ontological levels, is of a distinctly more "religious" rather than philosophical character.

The stages by which one transfers from active and discursive to passive and silent knowledge do not appear to be an issue for the author of *Zostrianos*. It is, however, an issue for both *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*, but of the two, it is only *Allogenes* that provides specific epistemic instructions to the visionary. Prior to their actual ascents, both Marsanes (X 6,12-7,3, see p. 651) and Zostrianos (VIII 2,24-3,13, see p. 646) and are preoccupied with many questions about the origin and nature of plurality, while there is no evidence that Allogenes has been raising the same sorts of questions, although the content of Youel's initial revelations concerning the emanation of the Aeon of Barbelo and its multiple contents from the single principle of the Triple Powered One presuppose nearly the same set of questions. Once the ascent is underway, in both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, the shift from positive, discursive knowledge based on kataphatic revelation to non-discursive, non-knowing knowledge is introduced by apophatic, negative theological revelations from the Luminaries of the Aeon of Barbelo. On the other hand, in *Marsanes*, there is no negative theology, and the shift from discursive to silent knowledge is marked by the Barbelo Aeon itself, speaking as the third of the Triple Powered One' three powers.

In the case of *Allogenes*, Youel's kataphatic revelations are sufficient to activate Allogenes' discursive intellect, which he characterizes as a "wisdom" that can make distinctions between levels of being, not only among determinate beings, but even between indeterminate (measureless) being and the unknowable principles beyond:

> **XI 50** [5] [...] ... [...] [6] [empowers those who are capable] of knowing [7] these things [by a] greatly [superior] [8] revelation, but I [9] was capable, even though flesh was [10] upon me. I heard from you about these things, [11] and because of the wisdom [12] that is in them, the thought [13] within me distinguished between the things [14] beyond measure and the unknowables.[15] Therefore I fear [16] that my wisdom has become [17] something beyond what is fitting.

Marsanes too—while apparently still in the body and without the aid of specific revelations—is able to make similar distinctions and analogies within the realm of being or substance (οὐσία) and between sensible, intelligible, and insubstantial (ἀνούσιος) realities. He employs the

dialectic method of discrimination or distinction by difference as recommended by Plato in the *Republic* and *Sophist*:

> **X 4** [26] [Whether] individually or [27] [as a whole], by difference (κατὰ διαφορά cf. *Republic* VI 509D-511E) [28] [I knew] that they [pre]-exist [29] [in the] entire place that is **5** [1] eternal .... [17] I have discriminated (διακρίνειν cf. Sophist 253DE) [18] and have attained the boundary of the partial, sense-perceptible [19] world (and) [20] the entire realm [21] of the incorporeal essence.

At the end of Youel's second revelation, Allogenes becomes divine and his wisdom has become complete. Having known the Good within him, he is now ready to hear unspeakable things about the Triple Powered One:

> **XI 52** [7] [My soul went slack] and [8] I fled and I was very disturbed. [9] And [I] turned to myself [10] and saw the light [11] that [surrounded] me and the [12] Good that was in me and I became Divine. [13] And the all-glorious one, Youel, [14] anointed (or: touched) me again [15] and she empowered me. She said: "Since [16] your wisdom has become complete [17] and you have known the Good that is within you, [18] hear concerning [19] the Triple-Powered One things you shall [20] guard in great [21] silence and great mystery, [22] because they are not spoken [23] to anyone except those who are worthy, [24] those who are able [25] to hear."

At the end of Youel's third revelation, Allogenes learns that the silent knowledge of the Triple Powered One is not at all of the positive sort by which one knows the Aeon of Barbelo, but is rather a kind of not-knowing:

> **XI 55** [17] Then the mother of] the glories [18] Youel spoke to me again: [19] ["O Allogenes], with [20] [incognizant knowledge] you [shall] know that the [21] [Triple-Powered] One exists before [22] [those that] do not exist. [23] [And those that exist] do not dwell [24] [at all] with those who dwell [25] [among those who] truly exist. [26] [Rather all these] exist [27] [as Divinity and Blessedness] [28] [and] Existence, [29] and as nonsubstantiality and [30] non-being [Existence]."

In her fifth revelation, Youel promises Allogenes that his earnest seeking for a period of 100 years will enable him to know himself as the Good that indwells him, thus filling him with the Logos—i.e., discursive knowledge—to completion. At this point he will have become divine and perfect, ready to receive a "primary revelation" from the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon that will enable a form of passive understanding in which the visionary no longer comprehends but is instead comprehended by the object of his contemplation. If Allogenes is successful in this, he will receive a conception or thought (ἔννοια) of the pre-existent One:

> **XI 56** [15] If you [seek with] [16] [perfect] seeking, [then] [17] you shall know the [Good that is] [18] in you; then [you shall know yourself], [19] as well, (as) one who [exists with] [20] the God who truly [pre-exists]. [21] [And after a hundred] [22] years there shall [come to you] [23] a revelation [of that One] [24] by means of [Salamex] [25] and Semen [and Armê, the] [26] Luminaries of [the] Barbelo-Aeon. [27] And [that beyond what] [28] is fitting for you, [you shall not know] [29] at first, so as [not to forfeit your] [30] kind. [And if you succeed], [31] then when [you receive] [32] a conception (ἔννοια) [of that One, then] [33] you [are filled with] [34] the Logos [to completion]. [35] And then [you become divine] [36] and [you become perfect....] **57** [7] If it [apprehends] [8] anything, it is [apprehended by] [9] that One and by [10] the very one who is comprehended.

Likewise in *Zostrianos*, as Youel administers Zostrianos' final baptisms, he too becomes truly existing and perfect. Bringing him before the Protophanes Aeon, she exhorts him to call upon the Luminaries of the Barbelo Aeon. But at that point, the two treatises diverge: as we have seen, in *Allogenes*, the Luminaries actually guide Allogenes on an ascent beyond the Barbelo Aeon through the three powers of the Triple Powered One before they disclose to him the apophatic "primary revelation" of the supreme Invisible Spirit, while in *Zostrianos*, the Luminaries deliver the negative theological revelation of the Invisible Spirit while Zostrianos is still at the Protophanes level of the Barbelo Aeon:

> **VIII 62** [10] And] [11] Yoel the all-[glorious] one [12] said to me: [13] "You have [received] all the [baptisms] [14] in which it is fitting to [be] baptized, [15] and you have become [perfect] [16] [for] the hearing of all [17] [these matters]. Therefore [call] now [18] upon Salamex and S[emen] [19] and the all-perfect Ar[mê], [20] the Luminaries of the Barbelo [Aeon], [21] the immeasurable [22] knowledge. [They] [23] will reveal [to you] **[63]** [1] [those of the] invisible, [2] [great perfect male] [3] [Protophanes, and] [4] [the ingenerate Kalyptos and] [5] [then they will teach you about] [6] [the virginal Barbelo aeon] [7] [and] the Invisible [8] [Triple] Powered Spirit."

On the other hand, as previously mentioned, in *Marsanes*, there is no apophatic revelation, but only a direct command from the Barbelo Aeon to be silent, which is surely equivalent to a cessation of active attempts to gain positive knowledge. To persist in that kind of discursive knowing will only result in a flight from the ascent and a return to the Barbelo Aeon:

> **X 8** [18] When the third [19] power (i.e. the Barbelo Aeon) of the Triple Powered One [20] contemplated (νοεῖν) him (the Triple Powered One), [21] it said to me, "Be silent [22] lest you should know and flee [23] and come before me. But [24] know (νοεῖν) that this One was [25] [silent], and concentrate on understanding (νόημα). [26] For [the power still] keeps [27] [guiding] me into [28] [the Aeon which] is Barbelo, [29] [the] male [Virgin]."

E. Learned Ignorance

In *Allogenes*, although true knowledge of the transcendent realm of the pure, determinate being of the Barbelo Aeon can be achieved in this world, knowledge of its indeterminate source beyond being can be achieved only by an ascent into the other world. This highest form of revelation is articulated by a negative theology that combines the two approaches to the knowledge of God classically known as the *via negativa* and the *via eminentiae*, such that the negation of all conceptual alternatives on one level of thought launches the mind upward to a new, more eminent level of insight. The Invisible Spirit exists, lives, and knows without mind or life or existence; he is inexhaustible and undiminishable; he is neither divinity, blessedness, nor perfection, neither boundless nor bounded, neither corporeal nor incorporeal, neither Great nor Small; he is without quantity or quality or eternity or time; he is not an existing thing, but superior to every conceivable attribute (XI 61,32-63,27).

The author of *Allogenes* carefully coordinates the negative ontological predications of the Invisible Spirit with an epistemology appropriate to contemplating him; at each stage of coming to know the higher realities, the knower is assimilated to the ontic character of the level of reality that he or she is contemplating. Ultimately, however, since the Spirit is beyond being, so also he is beyond any kind of cognition, and therefore he is "known" by not knowing him.

Indeed, it seems that the primary revelation conveying the ultimate vision of the supreme reality is identical with its subject: the Invisible Spirit is the very primary revelation by which he is known:

> **XI 63** [9] Nor is he something [10] that exists, that [11] one can know. Rather [12] he is something else that is superior, which [13] one cannot know. [14] He is primary revelation [15] and self-knowledge, [16] since it is he alone who knows himself. [17] Since he is not one of those things [18] that exist, but is another thing, [19] he is superior to all superlatives, [20] even in comparison to his character and [21] what is not his character.

The Invisible Spirit is so unknowable that he is in some sense his own unknowable knowledge, and forms a unity with the ignorance that sees him. In fact he seems to be equated with the state of mental vacancy itself:[21]

> **XI 63** [28] But he is self-comprehending, [29] like something [30] so unknowable, [31] that he exceeds those who excel [32] in unknowability. [33] He is endowed with blessedness [34] and perfection [35] and silence—not the Blessed One [36] nor the Perfection— [37] and stillness. Rather [38] it (these attributes) is an existing entity of him, [39] which one cannot **64** [1] [know], and which is at rest. [2] Rather they are entities [3] of him, unknowable to them [4] all. And he is much superior in [5] Beauty than all those [6] [that] are Good. And thus he [7] is unknowable to all of them [8] in every respect, and [9] through them all he is [10] in them all. It is not [11] just this unknowable knowledge [12] that is proper to him; [13] he is also joined through the [14] ignorance that sees him.

The "unknowable knowledge that is proper to him" involves not only human knowledge of the Invisible Spirit (objective genitive), but also the Spirit's own knowledge (subjective genitive) of himself and things other than himself. The Spirit abides in the ignorance that sees him, an ignorance whose image dwells also in us, as the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* makes clear:

> We also lack the faculty proper to the direct apprehension of God, even if those who represent him in some way reveal to us something of the subject by discourse as far as it is possible for us to understand, for he himself abides beyond any discourse and every notion, in the ignorance of him that is found in us.... One does not possess any criterion that might apply to the knowledge of God. One must be content with this image of God which is the ignorance one has of Him, an image that refuses to admit some form that might relate to a knowing subject. (*In Parmenidem* IX 20-26; X 25-29 Hadot 2.94-96)

Yet *Allogenes* makes it clear that one cannot simply use the equation between the unknowable deity and the primary revelation or incognizant

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21. The One excels all else in unknowability, and is now said to possess the attributes of blessedness, perfection and "silence" (for divinity?), so long as one understands these as indefinite, non-substantial attributes ("not *the* blessedness or *the* perfection"), which are themselves a collectivity, an actual "entity" (triad) of his, just as unknowable as the Unknowable One. Here one notes the Stoic notion of the fundamental property (πρῶτον οἰκεῖον) of any being: his own constitution (σύστασις) and self-consciousness (συνείδησις) of it, stated here in negative terms, the negative knowledge appropriate to a (non-)being who transcends being itself; cf. Chrysippus, *apud* Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* VII.85.

knowledge by which he is known as a way of knowing or speaking about him. The self-knowledge and existence of the Unknown One is not something distinct from him, but identical with him. To equate him with either knowledge or non-knowledge is to miss the goal of ones' quest:

> **XI 64** [14] <Whether one sees> [15] in what way he is unknowable, [16] or sees [17] him as he is [18] in every respect or [19] would say that [20] he is something like [21] knowledge, he has acted impiously against him, [22] being liable to judgment because he did not [23] know God. He will not [24] be judged by [25] that One, who [26] is neither concerned for anything nor [27] has any desire, [28] but it results [29] merely from the fact that he has not found the origin [30] that truly exists. He was blind [31] apart from the quiescent source [32] of revelation, [33] the actualization [34] from the triple-powered [35] preconception [36] of the Invisible Spirit.

It is nevertheless clear that *Allogenes* assumes that it is possible to achieve a consubstantiality between the known, the means of knowledge and the knower: the unknowable deity is united with the ignorance that sees him, which is identical with his own self-knowledge. By implication, he is also united with the non-knowing visionary as well. Thus there appears to be a kind of isomorphic mapping between both the epistemic and ontic states of the knower, the known and the means of knowledge at each stage of the ascent.

Since the Spirit is beyond being and determination, he not only transcends human knowledge, but also his own self-knowledge and knowledge of others than himself; in the language of Plato's *Parmenides* (138A-141D), the One is completely incomparable, and thus without relation to either to itself or to another. One such relation might be that between knower and known, a relation analyzed also by the anonymous commentator on the *Parmenides* to imply that the One is not knowledge in relation to itself, but is knowledge in relation to others, which he interprets as a difference in knowing subjects: god in himself is non-knowledge since he transcends any dichotomy between knower and known, although he appears as (infinite) knowledge to us; God possesses a knowledge outside knowledge and ignorance:

> It is, I say, that there is a knowledge that is beyond knowledge and ignorance, from which knowledge arises. And how, knowing, does he not know? And how, knowing, is he not in ignorance? It is that he does not know, not because he would first have been in ignorance, but because he transcends all knowledge.... Such is the knowledge (proper to God): it is not like that of a subject knowing known things, but it is a knowledge which is he himself. For just as there is a light that is illumined, such as the light of the air which comes from the sun, and just as there is a light which is unillumined because it is not a light that is darkened, but as it is a light which is not that one, such as the light of the sun when it rests in him, so also there is a knowledge which is knowledge of a knower, passing from ignorance to knowledge of the known, and there is also another knowledge, an absolute one which is neither knowledge proper to a knower nor knowledge of a known, but knowledge which is this One before every known or unknown and every subject coming to knowledge. (*In Parmenidem* V 10-15; V 32–VI 12 Hadot 2.78-82)

God's knowledge is not anything different from God, but is God's own self-identity which is momentarily grasped by the contemplator. This knowledge is an intellection without the reflection characteristic of knowing; as Plotinus suggests, it is the substrate of intellection:

> To what could its Intellection be directed? To itself? But that would imply a previous ignorance; it would be dependent upon that Intellection in order to know itself; but it is the self-sufficing. Yet this absence of self-knowing does not comport ignorance; ignorance is of something outside—a knower ignorant of a knowable—but in the Solitary there is neither knowing nor anything unknown. Unity, self-present, it has no need of self-intellection: indeed this "self-presence" were better left out, the more surely to preserve the unity; we must eliminate all knowing and all association, all intellection whether internal or external. It is not to be though of as having but as being Intellection; Intellection does not itself perform the intellective act but is the cause of the act in something else. (*Ennead* VI, 9 [9], 6,43-54, trans. MacKenna-Page)

As noted in Chapter 11, both the *Chaldaean Oracles* ("with the pure eye of your soul turned away, you should extend an empty mind toward the Intelligible in order to learn of it," frg. 1) and the anonymous commentator on Plato's *Parmenides* ("a non-comprehending comprehension and in an intellection that intuits nothing") advocate a cognitively vacant apprehension of the supreme:

> It is necessary therefore to subtract everything and add nothing: to subtract everything, not by falling into absolute non-being, but by thought attending to everything that comes to and through him, considering that he is the cause of both the multitude and the being of all things, while himself being neither one nor multiple, but beyond being in regard to all the things that exist on his account. Thus he transcends not only multiplicity, but even the concept of the One, for it is on his account that both the One and Monad exist. And thus one will be able neither to fall into the void, nor dare to at-

> tribute anything to him, but to remain in a non-comprehending comprehension and in an intellection that intuits nothing. Through such means, it will occur to you at some point, having stood apart from the intellection of the things constituted by him, to stand upon the ineffable preconception of him which represents him through silence, a preconception that is unaware of being silent and not conscious that it represents him and is cognizant of nothing at all, but which is only an image of the ineffable and is ineffably identical with the ineffable, but not as if knowing him (Καὶ οὕτως οὔτε ἐκπίπτειν εἰς κένωμα ἐνέσται οὔτε τολμᾶν τι ἐκείνῳ προσάπτειν, μένειν δ' ἐν ἀκαταλήπτῳ καταλήψει καὶ μηδὲν ἐννοούσῃ νοήσει· ἀφ' ἧς μελέτης συμβήσεταί σοί ποτε καὶ ἀποστάντι τῶν δι' αὐτὸν ὑπο[στάν]των τῆς νοήσεως στῆναι ἐπὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ ἄρρητον προ{σ}έννοιαν τὴν ἐνεικονιζομένην αὐτὸν διὰ σιγῆς οὐδὲ ὅτι σιγῇ γιγνώσκουσαν οὐδὲ ὅτι ἐνεικονίζεται αὐτὸν παρακολουθοῦσαν οὐδέ τι καθάπαξ εἰδυῖαν, ἀλλ' οὖσαν μόνον εἰκόνα ἀρρήτου τὸ ἄρρητον ἀρρήτως οὖσαν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡς γιγνώσκουσαν), if you can follow me—even though imaginatively—as I venture to speak (*In Parmenidem* II 4-27 Hadot 2.68-70).

In *Sententiae* 25-26, Porphyry echoes virtually the same method of "precognition" or "preconception." In order to contemplate God, the soul can go in two directions: toward the inferior nothing or toward the transcendent nothing; if it wants to reach the latter it first has to attach itself to determinate being, or as *Allogenes* says, "to stand."[22]

> 25. By intellection (κατὰ νόησιν) much may be said about that which transcends intellect (τοῦ ἐπέκεινα νοῦ), but it is better contemplated by incognizance than intellection (θεωρεῖται δὲ ἀνοησία κρείττονι νοήσεως), just as during wakefulness much can be said of sleep, but during sleep there is knowledge and comprehension (ἡ γνῶσις καὶ ἡ κατάληψις). For like is known by like, since all knowledge is assimilation to the known (πᾶσα γνῶσις τοῦ γνωστοῦ ὁμοίωσις).
>
> 26. We beget non-being (materiality) when we are separated from being, but while having being, we precognize it. If we were separated from being, we would not precognize the non-being beyond being (οὐ προεννοοῦμεν τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸ ὂν μὴ ὄν), but would beget non-being (materiality) as a false sensation in consequence of standing outside oneself (περὶ τὸν ἐκστάντα ἑαυτοῦ). For each is responsible by one's own effort for truly attaining the non-being beyond being (τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸ ὂν μὴ ὄν) and bypassing the non-being (materiality) that forms the lower limit of being.

According to the *Tübingen Theosophia*:

22. For P. HADOT, this conceptual similarity suggests that Porphyry is the author of the commentary; cf. "La métaphysique de Porphyre," in *Porphyre* (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité classique 12; Vandoeuvres-Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1966), 145-146.

> Porphyry the Phoenician, the fellow student of Amelius and disciple of Plotinus, speaks thus: 'Concerning the first cause we know nothing; for he is the object of neither sensible contact not intellectual knowledge, but knowledge of him is ignorance (ἀλλ' ἔστιν αὐτοῦ γνῶσις ἡ ἀγνωσία). (*Tübingen Theosophia* p. 117 Buresch)

While neither the *Three Steles of Seth* nor *Marsanes* offers direct evidence of negative theological predications of the highest realities or directly advocate the method of learned ignorance, both associate the supreme vision with a state of silence. *Marsanes* characterizes it as silent vision of the Unknown Silent One, a non-discursive, silent knowledge, as would befit the silence of the supreme reality:

> **X 4** [19] The [20] thirteenth speaks concerning [21] [the] Silent One who was not [22] [known], even the foundation (καταρχή) of [23] the indiscriminables (διακρίνειν).

> **X 7** [20] And as for the summit of the [21] silence of the Silent One, [22] it is possible <for> the summit (i.e., the Invisible Spirit) [23] of the energy of the Triple [24] Powered One to behold it.

As the third power of the Triple Powered One, The Barbelo Aeon tells Marsanes:

> **X 8** [21] Be silent [22] lest you should know and flee [23] and come before me. But [24] know (νοεῖν) that this one (the Triple Powered One) was [25] [silent], and concentrate on understanding (νόημα).

> **X 9** [21] We (Barbelo and her aeonic denizens) all have [22] withdrawn (ἀναχωρεῖν) to ourselves. We have [become] [23] silent, [and] [24] when we [too] came to know [that he is] [25] the Triple Powered One.

After he learns (X 9,1-10,7) how the Barbelo Aeon had separated from the Invisible Spirit by withdrawing from the first two of the Triple Powered One's three powers and then silently "sees" her silent source, Marsanes too—through his own silent contemplation—receives the power of the Barbelo Aeon. Now assimilated to the Barbelo Aeon—though not as a permanent resident—Marsanes likewise *sees* all three powers of the Triple Powered One, although it is unclear whether he is actually assimilated to those powers in quite the same way as was Allogenes:

> **X 10** [7] And [I (Marsanes)] have been given [8] the third part (the Barbelo Aeon) of [9] [the spirit] of the power of the Triple [10] [Powered] [11] [One]!

> **X 14** [15] I [was dwelling] [16] among the aeons that were [17] generated. As I was permitted, [I] [18] came to be among those that were un-[begotten]. [19]

> But I was dwelling in the [great] [20] Aeon (of Barbelo), although I [was separate from it]. [21] And [I saw] [22] [the] three powers [of] [23] the Triple [Powered] One.

As a temporary resident of the Barbelo Aeon, Marsanes achieves stability ("takes his stand"), and contemplates the Invisible Spirit, the first of the Triple Powered One's three powers. Through this contemplation, he is enabled to *see* the supreme Unknown Silent One. Again, it is not clear whether Marsanes is actually assimilated to this supreme reality in the same way as he was assimilated to the Barbelo Aeon:

> **X 15** [1] [... the] Silent One and the [2] Triple Powered One, [*and the One* (i.e., the Spirit)] [3] that does not have breath. [4] We took our stand [...] [5] [...] we [contemplated] ... [29] [... the Spirit] **16** [1] [that] does not have breath, [2] [and he] exists in [unknowability]. [3] And [through] him (the Invisible Spirit) I saw [4] the great [5] [unknowable power (the Unknown Silent One?)].

Having now surveyed the metaphysics and contemplative epistemology of the Platonizing Sethian treatises in comparison to one another and in the light of earlier and later Platonic sources, it now remains to assess the mutual literary and historical influences between Platonic and Sethian sources suggested by these comparisons.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SETHIAN GNOSTICISM AND THE PLATONIC TRADITION

I. The Encounter between Sethianism and Platonism

By now the indebtedness of the Platonizing Sethian treatises to the Platonism of the first three centuries as well as the similarities in metaphysical and epistemological doctrine between these treatises and certain Middle- and Neoplatonic sources should be generally apparent. The gnostic Sethianism of the second century CE arose within an intellectual environment stimulated by a revived Middle Platonism descended from the Old Academy and enriched by the Neopythagorean Platonists of the preceding two centuries. In a sense, this claim is only an extension of the ground-breaking work of Schmidt, Theiler, Festugière, de Vogel and Krämer discussed in Chapter 1, who confined their attention (as does Dillon's *The Middle Platonists* under the rubric "Some Loose Ends") mostly to Valentinianism, Hermeticism, and various other doctrinal systems reported by the heresiologists. The work of Elsas, also discussed in Chapter 1, went on to treat the Sethians—and such Nag Hammadi material as was available to him up until 1975—in their relationship especially to Numenius, the *Chaldaean Oracles* and above all to Plotinus and certain Neoplatonists, but without benefit of translations of *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*. Beginning in 1973, but now with the entire Nag Hammadi corpus in view, J. M. Robinson, B. A. Pearson, A. H. Armstrong, R. T. Wallis, and the present author extended this treatment to the Platonizing Sethian treatises, with particular reference to Plotinus.[1] Since 1990, further study of the Sethian

1. See J. M. Robinson, "The Three Steles of Seth and the Gnostics of Plotinus," in *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, August 20-25, 1973* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1977), 132-142; B. A. Pearson, "The Tractate Marsanes (NHC X) and the Platonic Tradition," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. B. Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 373-384; A. H. Armstrong, "Gnosis and Greek Philosophy," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (ed. B. Aland; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 87-124; R. T. Wallis, "Plotinus and the Gnostics: The Nag Hammadi Texts" (unpublished paper, 23 pp.); and my "The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent

corpus as a whole as well as even more recent critical editions of the Platonizing Sethian treatises now affords greater precision and scope than was possible for these earlier studies.[2] It therefore remains to gather up the results of the preceding chapters in an effort to better articulate the relations between these Platonizing Sethian treatises, their authors, and readers discussed in Chapters 12 to 15 with those of the Platonic sources discussed in Chapters 8 to 11. Chapter 17 will then conclude with a brief summary of the major features of the Sethian religion that have been highlighted in this study.

II. Platonizing Sethian Metaphysics and its Platonic Sources

The metaphysical hierarchy common to all the Platonizing Sethian treatises was described in detail in Chapters 12 and 13. We now summarize its main features, this time with reference to its relationship to specific Platonic sources.

A. The Invisible Spirit and the First Hypothesis of the *Parmenides*

The hierarchy is headed by a supreme Unknown One usually called the Invisible Spirit. This entity—like "the Good" of Plato's *Republic* VI 509B, Speusippus' absolutely simple One that "ought not even to be called being," and the "First One" of Moderatus, the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*, and of Plotinus—is said to transcend altogether the realm of determinate being. He is not a knowable "thing that exists" (XI 63,9-11.17-18), "existing prior to [all those] that truly exist"

of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom," *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 324-351, *idem*, "The Figure of Hecate and Dynamic Emanationism in The Chaldaean Oracles, Sethian Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *The Second Century Journal* 7:4, (1991), 221-232, and *idem*, "Gnosticism and Platonism: The Platonizing Texts from Nag Hammadi in their Relation to Later Platonic Literature," *Gnosticism and Neoplatonism* (ed. R. T. Wallis; Studies in Neoplatonism 6; Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 425-459. See Chapter 1 for discussion.

2. C. Barry, W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, J. D. Turner, *Zostrien (NH VIII, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 24. Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000); K. L. King, *Revelation of the Unknowable God with Text, Translation, and Notes to NHC XI,3: Allogenes* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1995); and W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, J. D. Turner, *Marsanès (NH X, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 27; Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000).

(VIII 64,15-16), who "exists prior to those that truly exist" in the realm of being (X 7,3-5), although in some sense he is "an entity along with his own being" (XI 62,1-2), or is himself "his own [existence], idea, and [being]" (VIII 74,8-10). He is beyond intellect, yet he somehow "alone knows himself" (XI 63,16), possessing an "unknowable knowledge that is proper to him," which can be experienced only through "the ignorance that sees him" (XI 64,11-14). As shown in Chapter 12, this highest entity is best described in negative terms drawn from the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* (see discussion in Chapter 9, p. 383 f.) and *Republic* 509B as "not-being" in the sense of "beyond being."

Since part of *Allogenes*' (XI 62,28-63,25) negative description of the One is word-for-word parallel to a passage in the *Apocryphon of John* (II 3,17-33; see Chapter 12, p. 503), one must suppose that the two treatises are either dependent one upon the other, or—more likely—upon a pre-Plotinian *Parmenides* commentary that served them as a common source. Both passages deny a triad of divinity, perfection and blessedness with regard to the Monad or Invisible Spirit.[3]

> **XI 62** [28] He is neither Divinity [29] nor Blessedness [30] nor Perfection. Rather [31] it (this triad) is an unknowable entity of him, [32] not what is proper to him. Rather [33] he is something else [34] superior to the Blessedness and [35] the Divinity and [36] Perfection.

It is significant that the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* also expresses reticence concerning such a triad within the highest principle, although it does not entirely want to jettison it either:[4]

> On the other hand, although they affirm that he has "snatched himself away" from all that is his, they nevertheless concede that his power and intellect are co-unified in his simplicity, and even still another intellect (the triadic second Intellect), and, although they do not separate him from the (supreme) triad, they believe that he abolishes number such that they abso-

3. It may be that this triad is a precursor and equivalent of the Existence-Life-Mind triad to be found in the Sethian Platonizing treatises (in the order of the *Apocryphon of John*: perfection ≅ life; blessedness ≅ intellect; divinity ≅ existence; in the order of *Allogenes*: divinity ≅ existence; blessedness ≅ intellect; perfection ≅ life).

4. Οἱ δὲ ἁρπάσαι ἑαυτὸν ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἑαυτοῦ εἰπόντες δύναμίν τε αὐτῷ διδόασι καὶ νοῦν ἐν τῇ ἁπλότητι αὐτοῦ συνηνῶσθαι καὶ ἄλλον πάλιν <ν>οῦν καὶ τῆς τριάδος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἐξελόντες ἀναιρεῖν ἀριθμὸν ἀξιοῦσιν, ὡς καὶ τὸ ἓν λέγειν αὐτὸν εἶναι παντελῶς παραιτεῖσθαι.

lutely refuse to say that he is the One. (*In Parmenidem* IX 1-8 Hadot 2.90-92)

The commentator here identifies those who place such a triad within a monad: those behind the *Chaldaean Oracles* (frg. 3, ὁ πατὴρ ἥρπασσεν ἑαυτόν, οὐδ' ἐν ἑῇ δυνάμει νοερᾷ κλείσας ἴδιον πῦρ), which located a Father-Power-Intellect triad within the supreme Father who is both mind and monad. Both *Allogenes* and the anonymous *Commentary* seem to presuppose a triadic doctrine similar to that of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, although they take a critical stance towards it. As we have seen, both the *Commentary* and the *Three Steles of Seth* locate another triad, Existence-Vitality/Life-Mentality/Mind, at the secondary level at which the divine Intellect (the Barbelo Aeon) pre-exists in the Invisible Spirit, while *Zostrianos* locates the triad within the Invisible Spirit, and *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* (but named Hypostasis-Actvity-Knowledge) associate the triad with an apparently separate entity called the Triple Powered One as the externalized δύναμις or activity of the Invisible Spirit.

B. The Aeon of Barbelo and the Middle Platonic Intellect

Below the Invisible Spirit, as his First Thought, is the Barbelo Aeon, a divine Intellect containing three subaeons or sub-intellects: one that is contemplated (νοῦς νοητός, called Kalyptos or "hidden"), one that contemplates (νοῦς νόερος or θεωρητικός, called Protophanes or "first appearing"), and one that is discursive and demiurgic (νοῦς διανοούμενος, called Autogenes or "self-generated"). The names of these aeons perhaps once represented the stages of the unfolding and proceeding of the aeon of Barbelo from its source in the Invisible Spirit, initially hidden in the Invisible Spirit, then first appearing, then self-generated, but in the present Platonizing Sethian treatises—though not articulated in the *Three Steles of Seth*—the phases of the Barbelo Aeon's generation are instead designated by the three phases of the Invisible Spirit's Triple Power.

Nevertheless, at its origin, the Barbelo Aeon is hidden as purely potential intellect in the Invisible Spirit. Once the Aeon of Barbelo is constituted, 1) Kalyptos represents the realm of that which truly exists, i.e. the ideas; next, 2) Barbelo "first appears" as the male intelligence which contains those that "exist together," that are "unified" (perhaps minds and ideas that are unified through intellection), represented by Protophanes who on the one hand thinks the ideas in Kalyptos and on the other hand somehow acts upon the individuals below; and finally, 3) Barbelo becomes the "self-generated" (Autogenes) demiurgical mind that contains the "perfect individuals" and could therefore be identified with the rational part of the world soul, executing its demiurgic function (XI 45,22-46,36). A similar arrangement is found in Numenius (frgs. 11, 13, 15, 16 des Places), Amelius (*apud* Proclus, *In Tim.* I.306,1-14; cf. I.361,26-362,4; I.398,16-26, cited in Chapter 9, p. 387), and the early Plotinus (*Ennead* III, 9 [13] 1, but rejected in *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 1). The Barbelo Aeon functions in a way similar to Numenius' second god: insofar as the second god is participated in and used by the first, that is, prefigured in the first and thus in a certain way *is* the first, it can be compared to Kalyptos; insofar as the Numenian second god is identical with and acts through the third, it can be compared to Autogenes, while the actual second mind is comparable to the Protophanes level of the Barbelo Aeon.

C. The Triple Powered One and Emanation in Middle Platonism

Mediating between the Invisible Spirit and the threefold Aeon of Barbelo is the Triple Powered One, a being endowed with the three powers of Existence, Vitality, and Mentality (or Blessedness). The Triple Powered One is the emanative means by which the Invisible Spirit generates the Aeon of Barbelo in three phases. 1) In its initial phase as a purely infinitival Existence (ὕπαρξις or ὀντότης), it is latent within and identical with the supreme One; 2) in its emanative phase it is an indefinite Vitality (ζωότης) that proceeds forth from Spirit; and 3) in its final phase it is a Mentality (νοήτης) that—through the contemplation of its source in the Spirit—takes on the character of determinate being as the intellectual Aeon of Barbelo. As a triadic mediator, the Triple-Powered-One is in contact with and even *is* in some way the two entities between which it mediates. According to *Marsanes* (X 7,1-8), the Triple Powered One is a pre-existent otherness, a kind of indefinite dyadic entity by which the Invisible Spirit is somehow activated and without which it would not give anything from itself. As we have seen in Chapters 9, 10 and 12, this emanative sequence is reflected in Plotinus (especially *Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 17, cited below, p. 728), but the closest terminological parallel is to be found in the anonymous *Parmenides*

Commentary, whose Middle Platonic provenance was argued in Chapter 9.

> Taken in itself as its own idea it—this power, or whatever term one might use to indicate its ineffability and inconceivability, i.e., the potential Intellect still identical with the One—is one and simple. But with respect to existence (ὕπαρξις), life (ζωή) and intellection (νόησις) it (the potential Intellect still identical with the One) is neither one nor simple. Both that which thinks and that which is thought (are) in existence (ὕπαρξις), but that which thinks—if Intellect passes from existence to that which thinks so as to return to the rank of an intelligible and see its (prefigurative) self—is in life. Therefore thinking is indeterminate with respect to life. And all are activities (ἐνεργείαι) such that with respect to existence, activity would be static; with respect to intellection, activity would be turning to itself; and with respect to life, activity would be turning away from existence. (*In Parmenidem* XIV, 15-26 Hadot 2:110-112)

A similar notion, the likelihood of whose Middle Platonic provenance will be urged at the end of this chapter, occurs also in Marius Victorinus (*Adversus Arium* IV.5,36-45 Henri-Hadot), who employs terminology similar to that of *Allogenes* (XI 49,26-37, cited in Chapter 12, p. 514):[5]

> Thus ὀντότης, that is existentiality or essentiality, or ζωότης, that is vitality, that is the primary power of universal life, that is the primary life and source of living for all things, and likewise νοότης, the force, virtue, power, or substance or nature of thought, these powers, then, must be understood as three in one, but such that one names them and defines their proper being by the aspect according to which each has a predominating property. For there is none of them that is not triple, since being is being only if it lives, that is, is in life; likewise living: there is no living that lacks knowledge of the act of living. Appearing as a mixture, in reality they are simple, but with a simplicity that is triple.

5. *Adversus Arium* IV.5,36-45: *Ergo* ὀντότης, *is est existentialitas vel essentias, sive* ζωότης, *is est vitalitas, is est prima universalis vitae potentia, hoc est prima vita, fonsque omnium vivendi, item* νοότης, *intelligendi vis, virtus, potentia vel substantia vel natura, haec tria accipienda ut singula, sed ita ut qua suo plurimo sunt, hoc nominentur et esse dicantur. Nam nihil horum est quod non tria sunt. Esse enim hoc est esse, si vivat, hoc est in vita sit. Ipsum vero vivere: non est vivere, quod vivat intelligentiam non habere. Quasi mixta igitur et, ut res est, triplici simplicitate simplicia.* Cf. Damascius, *Dub. et sol.* I.125,15 Ruelle = Westerink-Combès II 61.7-8: Οὕτω δὴ καὶ νοῦς καὶ ζωὴ καὶ αὐτὸ δήπου τὸ ὄν· ὧν ἕκαστον μὲν πάντα· ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν κατὰ τὸ τοῦ νοῦ ἰδίωμα, ἡ δὲ κατὰ τὸ τῆς ζωῆς, τὸ δὲ κατὰ τὸ τοῦ ὄντος. Ἆρα οὖν καὶ τὸ ὂν οὐχ ἁπλοῦν ἰδίωμα, οἷον οὐσιότης καὶ ἡ ζωότης ἐπὶ τῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἡ νοότης ἐπὶ νοῦ; and II.101,25-27 Ruelle: ὡς Χαλδαϊκῶς εἰπεῖν, νοῦς ἵσταται κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ζωὴ κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν, οὐσία κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὕπαρξιν.

Thus the second One—as Intellect or as the Barbelo Aeon—is a "traveling subject" that deploys itself, or "lives forth" beginning from the transcendent "being" of the supreme One—conceived as a self-contained static activity beyond both indetermination and determination—in three phases: 1) a stage of indeterminate or infinitival being (εἶναι, ὕπαρξις) interior to the One, a pure act prior to being (τὸ ὄν); 2) the going forth of "being in the process of determination," a boundless "otherness" or trace of Life or Vitality proceeding from the One; and 3) a stage in which this Life becomes defined as determinate being (τὸ ὄν) that becomes fixed by an act of contemplative reversion upon its own potential being still present in the One.

D. The Emission of Vitality or Life from the One

In the Platonizing Sethian treatises, the Existence phase is clearly identifiable with the supreme One or with the inchoate, prefigurative phase of Being/Intellect within the supreme One, and the Mentality phase is clearly identical with the Barbelo Aeon as the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit; the median phase of Vitality or Life, which *Zostrianos* and *Marsanes* seem to identify as a distinct entity, the "Triple Powered One" or "the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit," seems to have no explicit precedent in Middle Platonic sources other than the *Parmenides Commentary*.

There are, however two Middle Platonic sources that at least implicitly connect the derivation of pluriform being from original unity with a principle of Life. In Plutarch's myth of Timarchus' soul-journey through the sublunar regions (*De genio Socratis* 591B; based on Plato's myth of Er in *Republic* X), we hear of life as a primal principle linked by the Monad to all subsequent change at lower levels of reality:

> There are four principles of all things: the first is of life, the second of motion, the third of generation, the last of decay: the first is linked to the second by the Monad at the invisible, the second to the third by Intellect at the sun, and the third to the fourth by Nature at the moon. A fate, daughter of Necessity holds the keys and presides over each link: over the first Atropos, over the second Clotho, and over the link at the moon Lachesis.

Surprisingly, Plutarch places the principle of life as the supreme source of all change and becoming above even the principles of stability, the

Monad and Intellect. Dillon interprets Plutarch's Monad as a self-contemplating mind, and Intellect as the demiurgic mind; following Krämer, he compares the exalted position of life to the place occupied by the life principle in the *Chaldaean Oracles* and in the later Neoplatonists (although there it is never the *supreme* principle).[6] While here it is the Fates as holders of the keys that control access from one level to the next, in Orphic tradition (*Orphei Hymni* 1.7), Hecate too is "holder of the keys." But in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Hecate has a direct connection with life and vitality.

The *Chaldaean Oracles* feature a feminine principle of life named Hecate, said to be a sort of diaphragm or membrane, the "center between the two Fathers" (frg. 50 des Places), which separates the "first and second fires" (frg. 6), i.e. the supreme Father and the immediately subjacent paternal Intellect. In fragment 3 of the *Oracles*, it is said that the supreme Father, who snatches himself away, does not even include his fire (presumably his own hypostatic identity as supreme deity) in his own intellective power, which, after he retreats, remains as the second—demiurgical—mind which humans call the first. However, according to fragment 4, the Father retains his power, which the *Oracles* seem to identify with Hecate. All this is very similar to Moderatus' depiction of the origin of his First One from the self-privation of the Monad.

In the *Oracles*, Hecate seems to function on three levels as emitter, transmitter, and receptor of the principle of life and vitality; she exists prefiguratively and potentially as the supreme Father's "power," dynamically as the indefinite and perhaps dyadic "bond," "center," or "membrane" of the measuring triad who is the source and "womb" of multiplicity and matter, and finally as the receptive life-producing source of all, the cosmic soul. As ζῳογόνος (frg. 32), Hecate is the source of life, a veritable mother of the all. As Womb within which all things are sown and contained (frgs. 28, 30), she has the roles both of the Receptacle and of the Kratêr in which the world soul is fabricated according to Plato's *Timaeus*.[7] As mediator between the transcendent

6. DILLON, *Middle Platonists, 80 B. C. to A. D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 214-215; cf. Krämer, *Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik*, 98, n. 250.

7. Cf. the "cosmic hollows" of frgs. 34 (and 35), and the πολλῶν πληρώματα κόλπων of frg. 96, and L. BRISSON, "Plato's *Timaeus* and the Chaldean Oracles," manuscript, p. 11.

Father and the second or demiurgic intellect, she seems to play a role similar to that of Plotinus' "intelligible matter" or "trace" of unbounded Life emitted from the One that becomes bounded Intellect (cf. *Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 17, cited below, p. 728). In her higher aspect Hecate is equated with the Father's power (frgs. 3-4), apparently the indefinite potentiality whose actualization or determination is the second or demiurgic intellect, which Psellus (*Expositio PG* 122.1152a4-5, p. 189 des Places) calls a transcendent dyad. As power or potentiality, the force that always tends toward change and otherness, Hecate is led into schism: on a higher level, she exists not as life *per se* but as its source, and on a lower level, as the source of Soul.[8] Thus Life is a function, not the essential character of Hecate, and indeed in her intermediate rather than in her higher aspect of power.

In these three phases of her existence as the prefiguration, source and instantiation of ideal multiplicity, Hecate strikingly resembles the figure of Barbelo in the earlier Sethian treatises both in her maternal role and also in her relationship to Sophia, her lower, more negatively portrayed double, while in the later Platonizing Sethian treatises, the closest analogy to the figure of Hecate would be the proceeding Vitality of the Triple Powered One. Although the *Oracles* do not invoke Plato's Father, Mother, and Child triad by name, its functional equivalent seems to be present at the highest level in the figures of the Father, his "power" who is the prefigurative Hecate, and the paternal Intellect emanated from the Father's power and intellect (although Hecate is not said to be the "mother" of this Intellect). This triadic scheme was developed by later Neoplatonists into the triad ὕπαρξις[=Father]–δύναμις[=Hecate]–νοῦς, which was thought to be comparable to Plotinus' intellectual Being-Mind-Life triad that in turn was probably anticipated by the Existence-Life-Mind triad of the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* and by the Triple Powered One of the Sethian treatises *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* (and their own Middle Platonic sources).[9]

8. Cf. M. J. EDWARDS, "Porphyry and the Intelligible Triad," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 110 (1990) 19 n. 35 and L. BRISSON, *ibid.*, p. 11.

9. The triad, existence (ὕπαρξις) – power – intellect does not occur explicitly in the extant fragments, although Damascius frequently attributes such a triad to the *Oracles* (*Dub. et sol.* I.87,9-10; 108,17-19; 309,24-28 Ruelle [II.3,5-6; 36,2-6; 71,1-6 Westerink-Combès]). Consequently Hadot (*Porphyre et Victorinus* 1.267, n. 7 suggests the strong possibility that the word ὕπαρξις was already a substitute for *pater* in the *Oracles*. Although ὕπαρξις does not occur in the extant fragments of

Although not specifically designated as a principle of life or vitality, in this connection one should also bear in mind that Numenius (and Amelius) equated his first God with the supreme principle of *Timaeus* 39E (ὅ ἐστι ζῷον, "that which is really alive," cf. frg. 22 des Places) and attributed a basic vivifying function to his demiurgical third God:

> Whenever the (second) God looks and turns toward each of us, the consequence is that life (ζῆν) results and bodies live (βιώσκεσθαι), tended by God's far-shooting rays. Yet whenever he turns again towards his watchtower, all this is extinguished, while the (divine) Mind continues to live a blissful life (ζῆν βίου εὐδαίμονος). (Numenius, frg. 12 des Places)

E. The Invisible Spirit in Relation to the Triple Powered One

Like certain earlier Sethian treatises (*Apocryphon of John*, the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*), certain of the Platonizing treatises identify the supreme deity as the Invisible Spirit. The *Three Steles of Seth* (VII 125,23-25) identifies the supreme preexistent One as a "single living Spirit" and *Zostrianos* identifies this One with both the Invisible Spirit and the Triple Powered One, while *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* seem to distinguish the One from both the Invisible Spirit and Triple Powered One:

> **XI 66** [30] From [31] the One who constantly stands, [32] there appeared [33] an eternal Life, [34] the Invisible and Triple-powered Spirit, [35] the One among all those who exist.
>
> **X 4** [13] [The eleventh] and [the] [14] [twelfth] speak of the [15] Invisible One (*aoratos*) who possesses [16] three powers (*dynamis*) [17] and the insubstantial (*-ousia*) Spirit (*pneuma*) [18] who belongs to [19] the first unbegotten one (of the Triple Powered One's three powers).

So also the relation between the Invisible Spirit and Triple Powered One seems to vary: in *Zostrianos* the Triple Powered One is on the whole conceptually indistinguishable from the Invisible Spirit; *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* tend to distinguish them (but not consistently), while the

the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the verb occurs three times in relation to the First Principle: frg. 1,12: τὸ νοητόν, ... ἐπεὶ νόου ἔξω ὑπάρχει; frg. 20,2: οὐ γάρ ἄνευ νόος ἐστι νοητοῦ, καὶ τὸ νοητὸν οὐ νοῦ χωρὶς ὑπάρχει; frg. 84,3: for (the first connector) encompassing all things, in the singular summit of his existence (ὑπάρξεως, Proclus) exists, himself, entirely outside (αὐτὸς πᾶς ἔξω ὑπάρχει).

Three Steles of Seth tends to identify the Triple Powered One more closely (but not completely) with the Aeon of Barbelo.[10] Ultimately, however, it does not really matter whether the Triple Powered One as the emanative moment of life or vitality is located either wholly within the Unknowable One or the Invisible Spirit or within the Aeon of Barbelo, or is conceived as a separate hypostasis, since its basic mediating function is always the same in all cases.

The ambiguity in the names "Unknowable One" or (Triple Powered) "Invisible Spirit" for the supreme principle probably results from the melding of two somewhat incompatible traditional designations for the supreme deity, who for Sethianism is the Invisible Spirit and for Platonism is the One. From a traditional Sethian point of view the two terms are interchangeable, while for Platonists, the materialistic associations of the term "Spirit" in Stoic philosophy would disqualify its use as a simple equivalent to the supreme One beyond all being and corporeality.

In the Platonizing Sethian treatises, although the Triple-Powered One always functions as the potency (δύναμις) of the Unknowable One/Invisible Spirit by which he unfolds himself into the world of determinate Being and Intellect, its precise manner of operation can be conceived differently in different treatises. In *Allogenes*, it is said (XI 49,7-37, cited below, p. 727) to consist of three modalities or phases: Essentiality (ὀντότης) or Substantiality (οὐσιότης), Vitality (ζωότης), and Mentality (νοότης) or Blessedness (μακαριότης). Furthermore, as suggested in Chapter 12, unlike the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Zostrianos* (and perhaps *Marsanes*)—which only associate each single successive term of the Existence, Vitality, Mentality sequence (or its equivalent) with the three distinctive phases of emanation—*Allogenes* seems to locate all three terms at each phase of the process, thus distinguishing three successive states or manifestations of the entire Existence, Vitality, Mentality triplet as it becomes successively active at the level of each of the three highest entities. Thus at the level of the Unknowable One, the Being-Life-Mind triad is present as pure indefinite, infinitival activity (Existing, Living, Thinking, though dominantly existing); on the level of the Triple-Powered One, it is present as a triad of abstract qualities (Existence, Vitality, Mentality, though dominantly Vitality); and on the level of the Barbelo Aeon, as a triad of substantial realities, (Being, Life

10. See Chapter 12, p. 512 ff. and n. 13 there for a complete inventory of references.

and Mind or Knowledge, though dominantly Mind or Knowledge). As the externalized Thinking of the supreme deity and final phase of the Triple Powered One, the Barbelo Aeon is the universal Intellect, the realm of true Being and true Life. In the following diagram, the italicized terms indicate the relative predominance of each of the three modalities:

Unknowable One / Invisible Spirit	*Exists*	Lives	Knows
Triple-Powered One / Eternal Life	Existence	*Vitality*	Mentality
Barbelo / First Thought	Being	Life	*Mind*

F. Self-Privation and the Determination of Boundlessness: Moderatus?

In terms more reminiscent of Plato's and the Old Academic Indefinite Dyad or the *Philebus'* principle of the Unlimited, both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* also conceive the Triple-Powered One as the "delimiter" of the "boundlessness subsisting in the Invisible Spirit." As an initially unbounded entity, the Triple-Powered One emerges from its source in the Invisible Spirit as a processing boundlessness that turns itself back to its source in an act of objectifying self-knowledge; becoming stable and bounded, it takes on form and definition as Barbelo, the self knowledge or Mind of the Invisible Spirit (XI 49,7-37, cited below, p. 727; cf. *Zostrianos* VIII 16,2-15, cited in Chapter 12, p. 516 f.). Intellect thus appears as the movement of an indeterminate boundlessness: by contemplatively reverting to the Spirit and to itself, Intellect and true being emerge by knowing the content of the First One. As we have seen, this is essentially the same process found in the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* (XII, 10-35, both cited in Chapter 9, pp. 397 and XIV, 15-26, cited above, p. 698) and also in Plotinus (esp. *Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 17,6-43, cited below, p. 728). Or, in terms more similar to the Neopythagorean sources, especially Moderatus,[11] *Allogenes* has the Aeon of Barbelo emerges through the Triple-Powered One of the Invisible Spirit by a process of contraction, expansion, separation, and completion through contemplation of its source:

11. Neopythagorean texts derive the Indefinite Dyad from the Monad (and thence a triad by the interaction of these two principles) by a variety of processes; see the references in Chapter 9, p. 354 (and nn. 21-26), and the discussion of Moderatus, p. 363.

XI 45 [17] the [18] male virginal [glory], [19] [the first] aeon (Barbelo), the one from [20] [a] unique triple-powered [aeon], [21] [the] Triple-Powered One who [22] [truly exists]. For after it (the Barbelo Aeon) [contracted], [23] [it expanded] and [24] [spread out] and became complete, [25] [and] it was empowered [with] [26] all of them, by knowing [itself] [27] [in the perfect Invisible Spirit]. [28] And it [became] [29] [an] aeon who knows [herself] [30] [because] she knew that one.

The corresponding account of Barbelo's emanation on pages 76-84 of *Zostrianos* (cited in full in Chapter 12, p. 517) reflects the same sequence of procession, reversion and acquisition of separateness and stability. Having emanated from the Invisible Spirit, Barbelo's further descent and potential dispersion is halted by a contemplative reversion upon her source. By foreknowing her impending aeonic status potentially prefigured within the Invisible Spirit, she comes to stand outside him, striving toward him, examining both him and her prefigurative self (coincident with him), spreading forth and becoming separate and stable as an all-perfect (παντέλιος) "second Mentality," the duplication of his knowledge, the ingenerate Kalyptos, thus creating a "place" for those who follow her. In *Zostrianos*, Barbelo emanates directly from the Invisible Spirit who is himself triple powered; there is no language implying a distinct status for the Triple Powered One such as is found in *Allogenes*. Rather than *Allogenes*' sequence of self-contraction, expansion and spreading out, in *Zostrianos*, Barbelo emerges from the Invisible Spirit's passive, non-active Blessedness (i.e., self-knowledge) as a "declination" or "turning away" (Coptic [ⲣ]ⲓⲕⲉ) or as a "privation" (Coptic ϣⲱⲱⲧ), thereupon spreading forth and achieving determination by contemplating the Invisible Spirit as her own initial state of privation or indetermination:

VIII 80 [8] [She began to] [9] strive, since it was [im]possible [10] to unite with his [image]. [11] She saw his [privation] [12] while it was [next to] [13] his all-perfection, [14] since he (the Invisible Spirit) [15] pre-exists and [16] is situated over all these, [17] pre-existing, being known [18] as three-powered. The [19] Invisible Spirit has [20] never [been] incognizant: [he (merely) did not] [21] make an act of knowing, but was instead [abiding in] [22] perfection [and] [23] Blessedness. [Now] when [she] **[81]** [1] became incognizant [...] [2] and she [...] [3] body after [... in] [4] another way [...] [5] [en]lighten [...] [6] She [was] existing [individually] [7] [as cause] of [the declination]. [8] Lest she come forth anymore [9] or get further away [10] from perfection, she [11] knew herself and him (the Spirit), [12] and she stood at rest [13] and spread forth [14] on his [behalf]— [15] since she derived [16] [from] true existence, [17] she derived from

> that which [18] truly exists in common with all [19] things—to know herself [20] and the one that pre-exists.

By whatever channels, Moderatus' doctrine of divine emanation through self-privation or self-contraction and subsequent expansion surely constitutes an important source for the emanative doctrine of these Sethian treatises. According to the testimonia from Porphyry and Stobaeus concerning Moderatus (discussed in Chapter 9 p. 363 ff.), the Monad or Unitary Logos, having temporarily deprived itself of all unitary aspects of form, perhaps even abandoning these, and thus giving rise to the First One, becomes multiple by making room for primal Quantity, retaining only a plurality of "monads," that is, forms or measures which somehow "catch" or "revert" upon this primal Quantity and limit or render it "eidetic by numerical distinction," thus giving rise to the second One as the multiple realm of being, form and intellect.

> The Unitary Logos [i.e., the Monad or second One] ... intending to produce from itself the origin of beings, by self-deprivation made room for Quantity (ποσότης), having deprived itself of all its (the Logos') proportions and Forms.... This Quantity (ποσότης) ... and this form conceived as a privation of the Unitary Logos which contains in itself all proportions of beings are paradigms of corporeal Matter.... [which] is caught by it (the Unitary Logos) and not permitted to overstep its boundaries, as extension receives the proportion of ideal magnitude and is bounded by it, and as disarray is rendered eidetic by numerical distinction.... Number is collection of monads, or a progression of multiplicity beginning from a monad, and reversion terminating at the monad. Monads delimit Quantity, which is whatever has been deprived and is left remaining and stable when multiplicity is diminished by the subtraction of each number. (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.231,7-24 in part; Stobaeus, *Anthologium* I.8,1-8 in part)

Of course, the major difference from the Sethian treatises is that they conceive the supreme One as pre-existent and ungenerated, while Moderatus seems to derive it from the self-privation of the second One.

In *The Three Steles of Seth* (VII 125,25-32), the pre-existent One is identical with the Invisible Spirit ("you are the One; you are a single, living Spirit), who is the Existence, Life, and Intellect of all else. In VII 121,20-124,14, Barbelo is said to pre-exist in the pre-existent Monad as a Triple Powered One who was the first to see the pre-existent One. In terms very close to those of Moderatus (Simplicius, *In Phys.* 9.231,4–5 Diels) she emerges from her source as the first "shadow" of light from the light of the Father. At first hidden (καλυπτός) within her

source, she has generated multiplicity; while remaining one, she has become numerable, that is measurable, defined Being which can be distinguished from her source in the monadic pre-existent One. Just as the Neopythagorean arithmological treatises consider the Triad to be the first of the defined numbers following the One and the Dyad, Barbelo is said to become three-fold while at the same time continuing to be one with her source. Here, the supreme One's Triple Power is Barbelo herself existing prefiguratively or potentially within the supreme One or "living Spirit."

> **VII 121** [8] O Triple Male! [9] You have stood at rest: you first [10] stood at rest. You have become divided everywhere, [11] and you have remained One..., [30] O non-substantial One [31] from an undivided, [32] Triple [Powered] One, You are a threefold [33] power! You are [a] great monad [34] from [a] pure monad! **122** [1] You are a superior monad! ... [8] And you have been a cause of multiplicity: And [9] you have arisen and remained [10] One, while yet being a cause of multiplicity in order to become divided. You are [11] truly threefold: truly you are [12] thrice replicated. You are a One [13] of the One. And you are from [14] its shadow. You are a Kalyptos.... [34] You have empowered **123** [1] those—this is Kalyptos—[2] by thought. And you [have] emanated unto [3] these and [out of] these. You are divided [4] among them. And you [5] become a great male Mind, Protophanes. [6] O paternal god, [7] divine child, [8] generator of multiplicity! By division [9] of all those which are really existent [10] you have appeared to them all as [11] a Word (i.e., Autogenes).

Thus in the *Three Steles of Seth* and Moderatus, ontogenesis proceeds by the generation of multiplicity, the difference being that for Moderatus, the Monad apparently gives rise to the First One and generates being and intellect by transforming itself into a plurality of monads, while for the *Steles*, the first One is pre-existent, and Barbelo produces multiplicity while paradoxically remaining one throughout the process.

G. The Unknown Silent One of Marsanes

As a further degree of metaphysical elaboration among the Platonizing Sethian treatises, *Marsanes* (X 7,1-19; 9,1-20) posits an Unknown Silent One clearly beyond the Invisible Spirit[12] who—in *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and earlier Sethian treatises—is usually the supreme principle. Below this One come the Invisible Spirit and the Triple

12. Just as Iamblichus and Theodore of Asine placed a supreme "ineffable One" beyond the One of Plotinus; see discussion in Chapter 12.

Powered One, who seem to be virtually indistinguishable, since *Marsanes* (X 4,13-19) tends to collapse the eleventh and twelfth "seals" together and applies the epithet "Invisible"—normally reserved for the Spirit—to the Triple Powered One, and then identifies the Spirit in terms of the first of the Triple Powered One's three powers. As the "activity" of the supreme Unknown Silent One, the Invisible Spirit shares also in its silence, whose actualization is in turn the Triple Powered One, the "activity" of the Invisible Spirit, who is thus its first "power." In this act, "the Virgin became male since she separated from the male" (X 9,1-3), that is, the Aeon of Barbelo emerges as the third power of the Triple Powered One as it withdraws from its first two powers, the Invisible Spirit as its initial phase, and the pre-existent otherness of its feminine or dyadic median phase that characterizes the actual nature of the Triple Powered One itself. These two phases, apparently called Hypostasis and Activity (X 9,16-20), are *Marsanes*' equivalent for the Existence and Vitality powers of the Triple Powered One in the other treatises, while the Barbelo Aeon would coincide with its third power "Knowledge," which in the other treatises is called Mentality or Blessedness.

In Chapter 12, it was shown that Theodore of Asine posited two ones, a first One who is ineffable and apparently uncoordinated with anything below it, and a second, intelligible, One (ἕν) who is the aspirated breath that derives from the inaspirate ineffability of the first One and who defines an intelligible triad represented by the aspiration, the ϵ, and the ν of the Greek word ἕν. Given that *Marsanes* (X 15,1-4; 15,29-16,2) apparently distinguishes the Unknown Silent One and the Triple Powered One from the one "that does not have breath" (πνοή), who would seem to be the Invisible Spirit, it seems that the author of *Marsanes* is somehow in dialogue with these notions of Theodore. Indeed, it seems that the topic of a supreme Spirit was a matter of some debate, since Victorinus also saw the need to gloss a portion of the common source (i.e., the phrase "the single, perfect Spirit") he shares with *Zostrianos* (*Adversus Arium* I.50.1-3 = VIII 66,22-67,11, cited below, p. 737) with the words:

> **I.50** [4] a Spirit triple powered in [5] its unity, perfect Spirit and Spirit beyond spirit; for he does not [6] breathe, but rather it is the Spirit in that which is his being, Spirit [7] breathing toward itself so that it is Spirit, since the Spirit [8] is not separate from itself.

Of course, the metaphysical hierarchy of the Platonizing Sethian treatises extends also below the Barbelo Aeon. *Zostrianos* and (in more

summary fashion) *Marsanes* identify a number of incorporeal psychic and corporeal sensible realms that extend to the earth that were treated in Chapter 13: the Self-generated Aeons, the Repentance (μετάνοια), the Sojourn (παροίκησις), the Aeonic Copies (ἀντίτυποι), and the Airy Earth, to designate the realms of souls who have escaped reincarnation, souls between reincarnations who are destined for further reincarnation, as well as certain cosmic realms such as the sphere of the fixed stars, the planets, and the terrestrial atmosphere. In particular, *Marsanes* is significant for its extensive theurgical treatment of the nature of the soul, both cosmic and individual, in relation to numbers, the letters of the alphabet, and the nature of the Zodiac.

III. Plotinus and the Platonizing Sethian Treatises

In his *Life of Plotinus* 16,[13] Porphyry reports that revelations under the name of *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* as well as others were studied and refuted at great length in Plotinus' seminars in Rome ca 246-268 CE. The question then arises as to the relative chronology of *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* with respect to Plotinus. The fact that documents under precisely these names were read in Plotinus' circle suggests that they were produced earlier than Plotinus' refutation, i.e. before ca. 265 CE. Since it is especially *Zostrianos* that contains doctrines refuted by Plotinus in *Ennead* II, 9, it seems nearly certain that Plotinus' circle had some version of this document in view during the course of his refutations of the Gnostics, and that it is this treatise which Porphyry regarded as late and spurious, and against which Amelius composed a forty-book refutation.[14]

Certainly both *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* bear traces of redaction—some of which have been discussed already—and both are translations from the now-lost Greek originals that may have been available to Plotinus, so one cannot be certain of the precise version of these treatises available to Plotinus and his circle. Nevertheless, the texts that we pos-

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13. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16: συγράμματα πλεῖστα κεκτημένοι (the heretic Christians) ἀποκαλύψεις τε προφέροντες Ζωροάστρου καὶ Ζωστριανοῦ καὶ Νικοτέου καὶ Ἀλλογενοῦς καὶ Μέσσου καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων .... Later we read: ὅθεν αὐτὸς (sc. Plotinus) μὲν πολλοὺς ἐλέγχους ποιούμενος ....

14. Perhaps the 132 page length of *Zostrianos*, the longest treatise of the Nag Hammadi Library explains the length of Amelius'—known for his verbosity (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 20)—refutation.

sess are most likely to be,*in nuce* what Plotinus, Amelius, and Porphyry actually read. Not only this, but they almost certainly depend upon some earlier or contemporary Middle Platonic commentary on the *Parmenides* such as was also available and read in the Plotinian school. The evidence suggests that the fragments of such *Parmenides* commentaries as we possess—not only the anonymous Turin *Parmenides Commentary* but also the similar (or same?) *Parmenides* commentary that seems to underlie the negative and positive theological material common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos* (cited in Chapter 12, p. 505) as well as the source common to *Allogenes* and the *Apocryphon of John*—all stem from a common tradition of *Parmenides* interpretation drawn upon both by the Sethian Gnostics and by Plotinus, Amelius, and Porphyry (with whom Proclus began his survey of previous commentators on the *Parmenides*). None of the privative terms used of the One (immeasurable, invisible, indiscernible, partless) in the negative theology common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus is Neoplatonic, and the exclusion of color is found only in this text. Nor is it likely that any Neoplatonist would have characterized the supreme One as "Spirit" or his Existence as "idea and *logos* of itself" as occurs in the immediately succeeding affirmative theology. These pre-Plotinian interpretations of the *Parmenides* are clearly the sort of scholastic formulations to be found in the Middle Platonic commentaries and treatises read in the meetings of the Plotinian circle:

> In the meetings of the school he used to have commentaries read, perhaps of Severus, perhaps of Cronius or Numenius or Gaius or Atticus, and among the Peripatetics, those of Aspasius, Alexander, Adrastus and others that were available. (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 14)

Of these the most likely candidates would be Numenius and Cronius. M. Tardieu[15] suggests Numenius as the author of the material common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus; he was an authoritative Neopythagoreanizing Middle Platonist familiar with Judaeo-Christian traditions, who assimilated the supreme deity with the One. If part of *Zostrianos* were inspired by Numenius, Plotinus' assignation of its refutation to Amelius—who had copied Numenius' works (many of which he knew by heart), defended Plotinus from the charge of plagiarizing Numenius,

15. M. TARDIEU, "Recherches sur la formation de l'Apocalypse de Zostrien et les sources de Marius Victorinus," in *Res Orientales IX* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1996), 7-114.

and ultimately retired to Numenius' homeland in Apamea—would have been an excellent choice. But while that may be true for the *Parmenides* interpretation common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus, in regard to possible Numenian authorship of the clearly more sophisticated lemmatic anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*, it seems that Numenius would have been too well-known for a commentary by his hand to become anonymous. Perhaps his associate Cronius might have the right qualifications: a Platonist and lesser well-known companion of Numenius with a Neopythagorean background. Another candidate might also be Moderatus, whose book *On Matter* was cited by Porphyry, but for whom Porphyry lists no commentary. Perhaps it is best to let these pre-Plotinian treatments of the *Parmenides* remain anonymous. As Porphyry suggests, they were simply among the "available" products of second century Neopythagoreanism and Middle Platonism produced early enough to serve as sources for the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

A. Plotinus' Critique of the "Gnostics" in the "Großschrift"

In his critique of Gnostic doctrine contained in the *Großschrift* (*Ennead* III, 8 [30]; V, 8 [31]; V, 5 [32]; II, 9 [33]) completed perhaps in the year 265, Plotinus attacks the magical incantations, the myth according to which Sophia produces a "reflection" which in turn produces a "reflection of a reflection," as well as the concepts Paroikesis, Metanoia and Antitypoi, all of which are found explicitly in *Zostrianos*. First, he attacks the attempt to partition the Intellect into an intellect that thinks and another that "thinks it thinks," (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 1) or an Intellect in repose containing all realities (ὄντα), another that contemplates them and another (the demiurgic mind or perhaps the soul as demiurgic) that plans (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6; cf. III, 9 [13]). This partitioning is to be found in many sources including Numenius' fragments and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, but also in the doctrine of the Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes levels of the Barbelo Aeon as found in *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, which is likewise reflected in the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes*. With even greater vehemence, Plotinus attacks doctrines found principally in *Zostrianos*, especially its teaching on Sophia (VIII 9,16-11,9; see citations in Chapter 13, p. 572 ff): although he agrees that a certain wisdom (Sophia) presides over the making of everything (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 5; cf. VIII 9,16-19); the primal wisdom is "neither a derivative nor a stranger in something strange to it" (cf. VIII 9,18-19

"[fleeing what] is subject to the [Archon]") but is identical with true being and thus with Intellect itself (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 5). To such a claim that "there was within her (i.e., Sophia) no pure, original image" (VIII 9,10-11), Plotinus objects that "there is in the Nature-Principle itself an ideal archetype of the beauty that is found in material forms" (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 3,1-3). He attacks the idea that Soul or Sophia declined and illuminated the darkness, producing an image (εἴδωλον) in matter, which in turn produced an image of the image (but see Plotinus' own version of this in *Ennead* III, 9 [13] 3). He scorns the idea of a demiurge who revolts from his mother (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 10) who—unlike Nature's "tranquil vision" of the things above (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 2; III, 8 [30] 4; 8,6)—pursues not true being, but only images thereof, and whose activity gives rise to "repentances" (μετανόαι, i.e. of Sophia), copies (ἀντίτυποι, i.e. the Archon's counterfeit aeons), and transmigrations (παροικήσεις, *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6; cf. also the "alien earth," *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 11 with the "ethereal earth" of *Zostrianos* VIII 5,10-29; 8,9-16; 12,4-21 etc.). Plotinus is critical in general of the Gnostics' unnecessary multiplication of hypostases, rejecting conceptions such as a secondary knowledge that is the knowledge of a yet higher knowledge (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 1; cf. *Zostrianos* VIII 82,1-13). He also rejects their magical incantations (*Ennead* II, 9 [33] 14; cf. NHC VIII 52; 85-88; 118; 127,1-6; XI 53,32-55,11; VII 126,1-17; X 25,17-32,5).

On the other hand, Plotinus does not seem to attack the general scheme of the unfolding of the divine world implemented in these treatises. He accepts the notion of the traversal of vitality or life from its source in the supreme deity until its realization in the hypostasis of Intellect (*Ennead* III, 8 [30] 8-10; cf. XI 49,5-21). He agrees that one's self-image in us is elevated to silent union with God through contemplation (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 11; cf. VIII 44,1-5; XI 61,1-6 "As if I were incognizant of him, I [knew] him [i.e., the Unknowable One] ... I knew the [i.e., Triple Powered One] that exists in me"). He likewise accepts the notion of learned ignorance so prominent in *Allogenes* (*Ennead* III, 8 [30] 11; cf. XI 59,30-32; 60,8-12; 61,17-19; also Porphyry, *Sent.* 25-26, cited in Chapter 15, p. 690, and the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary, frgs. II and IV), as well as the notion that spiritual beings are simultaneously present in their entirely as "all together" in the Intellect (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 7-9; cf. the notion of "those who exist together" in

Protophanes according to *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, esp. VIII 21; 87,17-19,115-116).

Plotinus also agrees with *Zostrianos* (VIII 48,3-26; 55,13-26; 113,1-114,19) that Intellect itself contains a heavenly earth, sea, animals, plants, and men (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 3-4 and III, 8 [30] 1-8), although the two sets of passages are quite different in conception. The *Zostrianos* passages run as follows:

> **VIII 48** [3] At each of the [4] aeons I saw a living earth, a [5] living water, luminous [air] [6] and an [unconsuming] fire. [7] All [these], being [8] simple, are also immutable [9] and simple [10] [eternal living creatures], [11] possessing a variety [of] beauty, [12] trees [13] of many kinds that do not [14] perish, as well as plants [15] of the same sort as all these, [16] imperishable fruit, [17] human beings alive with every species, [18] immortal souls, [19] every shape and [20] species of intellect, [21] gods of truth, [22] angels dwelling in [23] great glory with an [24] indissoluble body [and] [25] ingenerate offspring and [26] unchanging perception.
>
> **VIII 55** [13] These are in relation to [14] [each] of the aeons: a [15] living [earth] and a [16] [living] water, and air made of [17] light and a blazing [18] fire which does not [19] [consume], and living animals and [20] [trees]; souls [21] [and] minds and human beings [22] [and] all those who dwell [23] [with them], gods [24] [or] powers or [25] even angels ...
>
> **VIII 113** [1] and angels, [2] daimons, minds, [3] souls, living creatures, [4] trees and bodies and [5] those prior to them, those [6] of the simple elements [7] of simple principles, and [8] those that are in [mixture] [9] and those that are unmixed: air [10] [and] water, earth [11] and number, pairing [12] and motion, [limitation] and [13] order, and breath, and [14] all the rest. There are [15] fourth powers that are [16] [in] the [fourth aeon], those [17] [that] are in the [totalities] and [18] perfections of all these, the powers [19] [of] powers, [wholes] of [20] [the wholes], [genera] of [21] [the genera, angels] [22] [of the] angels, souls [23] [of the] souls, living animals [24] [of the] living animals, trees [of] [25] [the trees], bodies [of the] [26] [bodies]. And [...] [27] [...] ... [...] [28] [...] **114** [1] his own. There are [those] [2] that are as if generated, and [3] those that are in an ingenerate [4] generation; and there are those [5] that are holy and eternal, [6] those that are changeless [7] within change and [8] in corruption within incorruptibility. [9] And there are those that exist as [10] wholes; there are those [that are] [11] [generic] and those that inhabit [an] [12] order and a rank; there are [13] those in [incorruptibility], [14] and there are the primary ones [that stand] [15] at rest with the secondary ones [among] [16] them all, [all] those [that] [17] [derive] from them and [those that] [18] exist [among] them and [from] [19] these that [follow] them ...

Here *Zostrianos* presents a comprehensive intelligible archetype of the physical world, archetypes of body, begetting (cf. the teeming vitality

and fecundity of the intelligible world in *Ennead* VI, 2 [43] 21-22), and perception (cf. VI, 2 [43] 21-22 and VI, 7 [38] 1-7). There are animals (cf. *Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 1-13, even irrational animals, VI, 7 [38], 9-10), matter and qualities (VI, 2 [43] 21,52-53), everything down to the "simple elements of simple origins" (cf. VI, 7 [38] 11-12). "All of them exist in unity, unified and individually perfected in fellowship and filled with the aeon which really exists" (VIII 116,1-6), as in Plotinus' intelligible world:

> ... but the gods in that higher heaven, all those who dwell upon it and in it, contemplate through their abiding in the whole of that heaven. For all things there are heaven, and earth and sea and plants and animals and men are heaven, everything which belongs to that higher heaven is heavenly ... for it is "the easy life" (cf. Homer, e.g. *Iliad* 6, 138) there, and truth is their mother and nurse and substance and nourishment—and they see all things, not those to which coming to be, but those to which real being belongs, and they see themselves in other things (ἑαυτοὺς ἐν ἄλλοις); for all things there are transparent, and there is nothing dark or opaque; everything and all things are clear to the inmost part to everything; for light is transparent to light (*Ennead* V, 8 [31] 3,30-36 Armstrong).

Both sets of passages clearly depend upon two of Plato's most famous myths, *Phaedo* 109D-114C, and *Phaedrus* 247A-249C (cf. also *Gorgias* 523A-6C; *Republic* X 614B-621B). But the emphasis is different: *Zostrianos* describes an external vision of aeonic contents, while Plotinus describes a transcendental mutual relationship between noetic entities internal to Intellect (ἑαυτοὺς ἐν ἄλλοις) in which "everything there *is* heaven." According to K. Corrigan:[16]

> Now it is striking that not one direct reflection of Plotinus' view of this sort of mutual transformation is to be found in any of the three *Zostrianos* passages. The idea of all things existing in one fellowship and filled with the aeon is perfectly Middle Platonic and Gnostic. Consequently, if *Zostrianos* is modeled on Plotinus or even dependent in some minimal fashion, it is a resounding failure. Yet we have no reason to suppose that the author of *Zostrianos* was philosophically unsophisticated or incapable of recognizing a major philosophical difference, had he or she seen it. We must conclude, therefore, either that the resemblance between the *Enneads* and *Zostrianos*

16. K. Corrigan, "Platonism and Gnosticism: The Anonymous *Commentary* on the *Parmenides*, Middle or Neoplatonic?," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 141-177, esp. 177.

> is purely coincidental or that Plotinus had read *Zostrianos*, wished to indicate *sotto voce* that this so-called vision is fundamentally *Greek* (which is at least partly why, I suggest, he quotes Homer, after his similar treatment of Hesiod's *Theogony*), and that there is more involved in such a vision than just a special kind of "intelligible" perception. If perception *is* at root intelligible and intellection aesthetic, this will have to be analyzed out in a different way in relation to the making of the physical universe and the nature of the intelligible universe, an analysis which Plotinus undertakes later in VI, 7 (38). However, it is also not plausible to suppose that there is only a coincidental resemblance between *Zostrianos* and the *Enneads*, because, for one thing, we have external, independent confirmation that Plotinus knew directly of this treatise. A reasonable conclusion is therefore that V, 8 (31) 3-4 is a subtle indirect critique and philosophical correction of *Zostrianos*.

A further description of the Kalyptos Aeon—or perhaps the Barbelo Aeon as a whole—suggests that it contains the archetypes of the entire realm of reality extending from the divine light itself all the way down to chaotic matter:

> **VIII 117** [1] It is there that [2] all living creatures are, [3] existing individually, although [4] unified. The knowledge [5] of the knowledge is there [6] as well as a basis for ignorance. [7] Chaos is there [8] as well as a [place] [9] for all of them, it being [complete] while they are incomplete. [10] True light (is there), as well as [11] enlightened darkness (i.e. intelligible matter) as well as [12] that which truly is non-existent (i.e. gross matter), [13] that [which] is not-truly existent (i.e. souls), [14] [as well as] the non-existent ones that are not at all (i.e. sensibles). [15] But he <is> the [16] [Good] from which derives [17] what is good and pleasant, [18] even the god from [19] [whom] derives the divine as well as that which [20] [is beyond divine], that which is great.

Here, the Kalyptos Aeon also contains the archetypes of all polarities, ultimate knowledge and ignorance, unordered chaos and organized place (i.e., the forms, cf. *Timaeus* 52A8-B5), of "true light" and "that which is truly non-existent" (ὄντως οὐκ ὄν, namely gross matter), "that [which] is not-truly existent" (τὸ οὐκ ὄντως ὄν, souls as source of motion and change) and the sensible entities that are moved by them, "the non-existent ones that are not at all" (οὐκ ὄντως οὐκ ὄν); the last four categories are traditional metaphysical formulations taken from the *Sophist* and *Parmenides* that become virtual Neoplatonic definitions of intermediate metaphysical entities.[17] In *Ennead* III, 6 [26] 13,50-55, Plotinus com-

17. The significance of these various combinations of negative terms is clarified by Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, I.233,1-4: "Accordingly certain of

pares gross matter to Plato's Receptacle and nurse of becoming; they are like a mirror in which visible things appear and remain, but the mirror itself is invisible and thus, in comparison to the not-truly existent images which participate in the truly existent forms, does not really exist:[18]

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the ancients call the noetic realm 'truly existent,' the psychic 'not truly existent,' the perceptible 'not truly non-existent,' and the material 'truly non-existent'" (διὸ καὶ τῶν παλαιῶν τινες ὄντως μὲν ὂν καλοῦσι τὸ νοητὸν πλάτος, οὐκ ὄντως δὲ ὂν τὸ ψυχικόν, οὐκ ὄντως δὲ οὐκ ὂν τὸ αἰσθητόν, ὄντως δὲ οὐκ ὂν τὴν ὕλην). According to R. Tournaire, the predicate ὄν means innately organized (intelligible or psychic), οὐκ ὄν means innately unorganized (sensible, material), while the qualifier ὄντως signifies what is stable or stabilized (intelligible or material), and οὐκ ὄντως signifies perceptible or intelligible reality subject to change ("La classification des existants selon Victorin l'Africain," *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1 [1996], 55-63; cf. P. HADOT, *Porphyre et Victorinus* 1.147-211 and P. Henry, ed., and P. Hadot, trans., *Marius Victorinus, Traités théologiques sur la Trinité*. Vol. I. Texte et traduction. Vol II. Notes. [Sources chrétiennes, 68-69; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1960], 2.712). In *De caelo* 282a4-b7 (reflected also in the *Categories*), Aristotle makes the same distinctions, using ἀεί instead of ὄντως, and similar terminology appears in Plato, for example in the *Sophist* 240B7-12 and 254D1 there is the series ὄντως ὄν, οὐκ ὄντως οὐκ ὄν, ὄντως μὴ ὄν, and in *Parmenides* 162A3 there is the series εἶναι ὄν, εἶναι μὴ ὄν, μὴ εἶναι μὴ ὄν, μὴ εἶναι ὄν. An attempt to invoke the same categories also occurs in *Allogenes* XI 56,20-35: "The [Triple-Powered] One exists before [those that] do not exist, [those that exist] (but) do not [truly] exist, [and those that] truly exist," and in a revelation cited in Codex Bruce, *Untitled*, 237, 20-23 [Schmidt-MacDermot]: "And when Phosilampes understood, he said: 'On account of him are those things which really and truly exist and those which do not exist truly. This is he on whose account are those that truly exist which are hidden, and those that do not exist truly which are manifest,'" (ⲁⲩⲱ ⲛⲧⲉⲣⲉϥⲛⲟⲓ ⲙⲙⲟϥ ⲛ̀ⲑⲓ ⲫⲱⲥⲓⲗⲁⲙⲡⲏⲥ ⲡⲉϫⲁϥ ϫⲉ ⲉⲧⲃⲏⲏⲧϥ ⲛⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲟⲛⲧⲱⲥ ⲛⲁⲙⲉ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲛⲥⲉⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲁⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉ ⲡⲁⲓ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲉⲧⲃⲏⲏⲧϥ ⲛ̀ⲑⲓ ⲛⲉⲧⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲛⲁⲙⲉ ⲉⲑⲏⲡ ⲙⲛ ⲛⲉⲧⲉⲛⲥⲉⲱⲟⲟⲡ ⲁⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲉ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ); here the categories alternate between modes of being (ὄντως ὄν, both absolute and "hidden" being, intelligibles and perhaps souls) and non-being (ὄντως οὐκ ὄν, both absolute and visible non-being, matter and perhaps sensible bodies), rather than exclusively between modes of non-being. In Marius Victorinus, *Ad Candidum* 11,1-12 [Henri-Hadot] one finds the sequence *quae vere sunt, quae sunt, quae non vere non sunt, quae non sunt, quae non vere sunt, vere quae non sunt* (cf. *Melchizedek* NHC IX 6,12-14; 16,18-19).

18. *Ennead* III, 6 [26] 13,50-55: Εἰ μὲν οὖν ἔστι τι ἐν τοῖς κατόπτροις, καὶ ἐν τῇ ὕλῃ οὕτω τὰ αἰσθητὰ ἔστω· εἰ δὲ μὴ ἔστι, φαίνεται δὲ εἶναι, κἀκεῖ φατέον φαίνεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς ὕλης αἰτιωμένους τῆς φαντάσεως τὴν τῶν ὄντων ὑπόστασιν, ἧς τὰ μὲν ὄντα ὄντως ἀεὶ μεταλαμβάνει, τὰ δὲ μὴ ὄντα μὴ ὄντως, ἐπείπερ οὐ δεῖ οὕτως ἔχειν αὐτὰ ὡς εἶχεν ἄν, τοῦ ὄντως μὴ ὄντος εἰ ἦν αὐτά.

> If, then, there really is something in mirrors, let there really be objects of sense in matter in the same way; but if there is not, but only appears to be something, then we must admit, too, that things only appear on matter, and make the reason for their appearance the existence of the real beings, an existence in which the real beings always really participate, but the beings which are not real, not really; since they cannot be in the same state as they would be if real beings did not really exist and they did. (*Ennead* III, 6 [26] 13,50-55 [Armstrong])

For Plotinus, matter, emanating as the otherness proximate to the One, is the unilluminated residue remaining after its expulsion from the Intelligible and its passage through the stage of precosmic matter at the lower bound of the intelligible realm and through the stage of cosmic or sensible matter as the substrate of corporeal objects. He characterizes matter *per se* is a primal otherness that has "walked out of true being into non-being" (*Ennead* II, 5 [25] 5,28-9), but is caught (καταληφθεῖσα) at both the intelligible and the sensible levels, presumably to form things like numbers and shapes and thence sensible bodies. Thereafter, "it could belong to neither class of realities; it is only left for it to be potentially a sort of weak and dim phantasm unable to receive a shape" (*Ennead* II, 5 [25] 5,20-22). When matter is apprehended by the intelligible, the product is a spiritual being, perhaps a daemon or the creative soul descending into indefiniteness, in turn producing images of intelligible reality in the perceptible realm: the stars, animals, plants, all the way down to inanimate nature. As *Zostrianos* says, "But it <is> the [Good] from which derives what is good and pleasant," what is divine and beyond divine.

Some of this sounds a bit like Moderatus, who, according to Porphyry, characterized matter as a turning away from intelligible and perceptible species towards non-being; it flees from the good, but is "caught"—καταλαμβάνεται—by it at the level of the intelligible and psychic realm and rendered eidetic in the form of numbers and geometrical shapes, and not permitted to "overstep its boundaries." While Plotinus would seem to have no objection to the prefigurative (but not actual!) existence in the intelligible world of matter, place, bodies, living creatures, souls, and pure being (which latter is the nature of that world), he surely would demur at the notion that it would also contain chaos and "a basis for ignorance": there is no basis for ignorance in the intelligible world; even the One's lack of self-intellection cannot be construed as a form of ignorance, which "is of something outside—a knower ignorant

of a knowable—but in the Solitary there is neither knowing nor anything unknown; being One, self-present, it has no need of self-intellection" (*Ennead* VI, 9 [9] 6,46-50).

On the other hand, both *Zostrianos* and Plotinus agree that matter can be a danger for the soul, whether that be the cosmic or individual soul. In I,8 [51] Plotinus develops two variations on the fall of the λόγος, the first in relation to soul:

> That which does not stay like this (soul contemplating Intellect) but goes out from itself because it is not perfect or primary but is a sort of ghost (ἴνδαλμα) of the first soul, because of its deficiency, as far as it extends, is filled with indefiniteness and sees darkness, and has matter by looking at that which it does not look at (as we say that we see darkness as well as the things we actually see). (*Ennead* I, 8 [51] 4,28-32; cf. V, 2 [11] 1,18-27).

The second variation in relation to Intellect is even more pertinent:

> So this intellect which sees matter is another intellect which is not intellect, since it presumes (τολμήσας) to see what is not its own .... so intellect leaving its own light in itself and as it were going outside itself and coming to what is not its own, by not bringing its own light with it experiences (ἔπαθε) something contrary to itself that it may see its contrary (*Ennead* I, 8 [51] 9,18-26).

Compare *Zostrianos*:

> **VIII 45** [12] When (this type) repeatedly withdraws [13] into itself alone [14] and is occupied with [15] the knowledge of other things, [16] since the intellect and immortal [soul] do [not] [17] intelligize, it thereupon [18] experiences deficiency, [19] for it too turns, has nothing, and [20] separates from it (the intellect) and [21] stands [apart] and experiences [22] an alien [impulse] [23] instead of becoming a unity. [24] So that (type of person) resembles many forms. [25] And when it turns aside, it [26] comes into being seeking those things that [27] do not exist. When it [28] descends to them in thought, [29] it cannot understand them [30] in any other way unless **46** [1] it be enlightened, and it becomes [2] a physical entity. Thus this type of person [3] accordingly descends into generation, [4] and becomes speechless because of the [5] difficulties and indefiniteness [6] of matter. Although possessing [7] eternal, immortal power, [8] (this type) is bound in the clutches of [9] the body, [removed], [10] and [continually] bound [11] within strong bonds, [12] lacerated [13] by every evil spirit, until [14] it once more [reconstitutes itself] and begins again [15] to inhabit it.

Besides this mixture of acquiescences, objections, and corrections, it may be that Plotinus' encounter with the Gnostics also caused him to tighten up on his own interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* (esp. 39E), for

example, in *Ennead* III, 9 [13] where he toys with a tripartition of the divine Intellect very similar to that of Numenius and the Sethian Barbelo Aeon (but which he explicitly rejects in *Ennead* II, 9 [33] 6). In *Ennead* VI, 6 [34] "On Numbers," produced immediately after his antignostic treatise, he changes the order of the triad Being-Life-Mind occasionally applied to the unfolding of the Intellect from the One (based on his interpretation of the first two hypotheses of the *Parmenides*) in some of the earlier *Enneads* to the order Being-Mind-Life, and restricts its presence to the internal structure,of Intellect. In Chapter 10 (p. 437 ff.) it was suggested that the order Being-Mind-Life, deriving from the influence of the *Timaeus* 39E and *Sophist* 248E-249A passages cited in Chapter 10 (pp. 407-409) and is used mainly in "noological" contexts where the structure of Intellect and its relation to Soul is of uppermost concern, while the order Being-Life-Mind, based on the *Parmenides*, is used mainly in derivational contexts where the relation of Intellect or determinate being to its indeterminate, unitary source is of uppermost concern. But it is also possible that Plotinus moved in this direction in response to the Sethian Existence-Vitality-Mentality triad that *Allogenes* tended to present as an intermediate quasi-hypostatic figure, the Triple Powered One, to which he may have objected as implying an unnecessary intermediate hypostasis between the One and Intellect (i.e., the Barbelo Aeon).

According to K. Corrigan, a number of elements in the first three treatises of the *Großschrift* can be significantly illuminated by a comparison with features in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* that demonstrate Plotinus' knowledge of the Sethian texts.[19] The "most reasonable interpretation"

19. K. CORRIGAN, "Platonism and Gnosticism: The Anonymous *Commentary* on the *Parmenides:* Middle or Neoplatonic?" in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 142-144. In an earlier version of this paper ("The Anonymous Turin Commentary on the Parmenides and the Distinction between Essence and Existence in Middle Platonism, Plotinus' Circle, and Sethian Gnostic Texts," manuscript of 1996), Corrigan raised the possibility of an echo of the Sethian figures Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes in Plotinus' naturalistic treatment of light in *Ennead* V, 5 [32] 7 and particularly the veiling, "first appearing," and "self-appearing" of intellect in V, 5 [32] 7,31-5: "Thus indeed Intellect, veiled (καλύψας) itself from all the outer, withdrawing to the inmost, seeing nothing, beholds—not some other light in some other thing but the light within itself alone, pure, suddenly apparent (φανέν), so that it wonders

of the evidence is that—in addition to other treatises—Plotinus had read at least two of the Platonizing Sethian Gnostic texts and that they led him to rethink some of the major philosophical problems of his day.[20] Moreover, since the Sethian treatises show virtually nothing of the subtlety of Plotinus' analysis of these problems, they almost certainly did not use the *Enneads* as one of their sources, but rather pre-Plotinian sources. There is thus adequate warrant for placing the composition of *Zostrianos* and probably also *Allogenes* at a time before Plotinus composed his *Großschrift*, since most of their doctrine could—as should now be evident—be drawn from the doctrines of Moderatus, Numenius, the *Chaldaean Oracles* and other second century Platonic sources, in addition to previous Sethian treatises, the *Gospel of the Egyptians* in particular.

B. Zostrianos and Allogenes in the Light of Plotinus' Critique

As suggested in Chapter 5's treatment of the compositional sequence of the Platonizing Sethian treatises among themselves (*Zostrianos* or the *Three Steles of Seth* followed by *Allogenes* followed by *Marsanes*), it may be that *Allogenes* was composed partly as a revision of the triadic metaphysics of *Zostrianos*, perhaps in the light of Plotinus' critique of the latter. *Allogenes* eliminates all discussion of celestial aeonic levels

whence it appeared (ἐφάνη), from within or without, and when it has gone forth, to say 'It was within; yet no, it was without.'"

20. As CORRIGAN states: "I propose that we should be alive to the real possibility that all of the treatises after the *Großschrift*, especially those with cognate interests such as VI, 7 (38) and VI, 8 (39), will bear similar traces of such a dialogue. In which case, and in the sense we have specified, Plotinus is certainly influenced by the Gnostics, for some of his most mature thought is shaped by an implicit conversation with them" ("Positive and Negative Matter in Later Platonism: The Uncovering of Plotinus' Dialogue with the Gnostics," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*), ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (Atlanta, GA: The Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 42. In note 77 of this article, he adds: "Thus, even where Plotinus rejects certain ideas, he does so already in a philosophical context in which his "opponents" might well agree with him. For example, the strong partitioning of Intellect and the reduplication of knowledge are already "prefigured" in the doubleness of intellect argument of III, 8, 11,25-6 (even in elements of a shared philosophical language): ἔφεσις γὰρ καὶ ἐν τούτῳ καὶ σύννευσις πρὸς τὸ εἶδος αὑτοῦ. Again, the criticism of the "image of an image" (II, 9, 10-11) has its earlier philosophical echo at III, 8, 2,22-34. Or, finally, even Plotinus' ridicule of magical incantations has to be offset by his quasi-Heideggerian etymology in V, 5, 5 and even by the appeal to Egyptian, non-discursive hieroglyphs in V, 8, 6."

below the Barbelo Aeon. On the other hand, the doctrine of the three-phase generation of the Aeon of Barbelo from the unfolding of the three-fold potency of the supreme Invisible Spirit—which has parallels in Plotinus' own doctrine of emanation but is scattered about through *Zostrianos*—is gathered together into the initial revelations of Youel on pp. 45-49, but at the same time it appears to have been transformed from a dynamic modalistic process inherent within the supreme principle (the Invisible Spirit) into a separately-existing, quasi-hypostatic entity interposed between a supreme Unknowable One and the Barbelo Aeon (implying, however, a multiplication of hypostases likely unacceptable to Plotinus). Instead of limiting the visionary ascent to the Protophanes-level of the Barbelo Aeon as in *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* portrays an additional ascent through the various levels of the Triple Powered One. Rather than interpreting the stages of the ascent as a sequence of baptisms administered by a plurality of revealers (Authrounios, Ephesech, and Yoel), *Allogenes* "de-ritualizes" the ascent in terms of a sequence of epistemic states, thus interpreting *Zostrianos*' negative-theological revelation of the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit as a "primary revelation," a technique of learned ignorance similar to that of fragment 1 of the *Chaldaean Oracles* and fragment II (p. 91 verso) of the *Parmenides Commentary*.

In short, *Allogenes* restructures the metaphysics of *Zostrianos* into a tighter, more systematic framework, limits the metaphysical exposition to the transcendent spheres extending from the intellectual levels of the Barbelo Aeon to the supreme Invisible Spirit, more clearly articulates the process by which the Barbelo Aeon emanates from the Invisible Spirit, omits most instances of ecstatic praise and lists of divine beings, and frees the whole from a baptismal context. Omission of the role of Sophia and the Archon as well as the extensive discussion on the various types of souls entails a shift of attention away from the physical and psychological doctrine of the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus* toward the more specifically theological issues of the *Parmenides*. The result has a remarkable, if not intentional, resemblance to Diotima's initiation of Socrates into the mysteries of Eros, supplemented by the apophatic approach to the One in the *Parmenides*. The effect is to produce a work of enhanced acceptability to the critical concerns of Plotinus' circle without abandoning the essential divine beings of Sethianism and its commitment to the authority of revelation.

C. Pre- or Post-Plotinian Authorship of *Zostrianos?*

R. Majercik has recently argued that *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* neither predate nor are contemporaneous with, but postdate Plotinus, on the grounds that the triadic groupings used in them have an explicit and fixed form uncharacteristic of Plotinus; that their technical use of the term ὕπαρχις for the first member of the triple-powered Existence-Vitality-Mentality triad has no specific significance for Plotinus (whose Being-Life-Mind triad is restricted to the realm of Intellect); and that the nomenclature of these triads on various levels reflects a method of paronymy and of predominance and implication likewise uncharacteristic of Plotinus.[21] Instead, all of these features are found in Plotinus' disciple Porphyry, whose lost commentary on the *Chaldaean Oracles* and perhaps the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary attributed to him by P. Hadot must have been the Greek source that mediated them not only to the Sethian treatises, but to the Christian Neoplatonists such as Victorinus and Synesius. In light of Porphyry's probable authorship of this commentary and of Amelius' and Porphyry's critique of the "revelations" of Zostrianos and Zoroaster in particular, one may suggest that the Gnostics in Rome revised their revelations (or produced new revelations) to conform more closely to the teachings of the great Porphyry—"a politic way to gain intellectual credibility in Roman philosophical circles" (*ibid.*, 488).

To these arguments for the post-Plotinian authorship of both the *Parmenides commentary* and the Platonizing Sethian treatises, K. Corrigan observes that the explicit Gnostic triads are more plausibly pre-Plotinian, Platonic elaborations in the Chaldaean tradition of the type which Amelius develops, and the method of paronyms that seems to give rise to the ὀνοΐτης-ζωότης-νοότης triad (as well as the principles of predominance and implication) is also familiar to Middle Platonism—in, for example, Sextus Empiricus, Alcinous, the *Corpus Hermeticum* etc.[22] Furthermore, the principle of mutual implication and pre-

21. See R. MAJERCIK, "The Being-Life-Mind Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992), 475-488. See also n. 28 below.

22. As K. CORRIGAN ("Platonism and Gnosticism: The Anonymous *Commentary* on the *Parmenides:* Middle or Neoplatonic?," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001], 168) points out, αὐτότης and ἑτερότης are attested in "Pythagorean" thought by Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Phys.* II, 248-284), and in the *Didaskalikos* X.3, there occurs a triad of adjectival epithets (αὐτοτελής-ἀει-

dominance is clearly present already in Plotinus (e.g., *Ennead* V, 8.4,7-24), Numenius (frg. 41 des Places = test. 33 Leemans), and perhaps in the *Chaldaean Oracles* (frgs. 21, 27 des Places). The dependence of Victorinus on Porphyry does not mean that Porphyry is the ultimate source of the terms τριδύναμος, ὕπαρξις (already equivalent to ὑπόστασις in Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De anima* 90,25 Bruns), ὀντότης, οὐσιότης (cf. Alcinous/Albinus, *Didask.* X.3,7), ζωότης, and νοότης. The ultimate source of these terms and ideas probably cannot be identified as a particular individual, but is more than likely the philosophical exchange within Plotinus' circle in Rome 244-269 CE, which included not only Plotinus, Porphyry, and Amelius, but also quite likely readers—if not authors—of the Platonizing Sethian treatises. And even if the Sethian treatises we currently possess are revisions of those available to Plotinus, there had to have been something in their earlier versions that was philosophically sufficiently objectionable to Plotinus' circle in the first place in order to merit a 40-volume refutation by Amelius. Moreover the parallels between the descriptions of the "living earth" in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* and *Ennead* V, 8.3-4 discussed above "show as closely as one is going to get that the Gnostic versions are not based on Plotinus, for nothing of Plotinus' real thought appears in those texts."[23]

One may also add that—given the sophistication of speculation on the manner in which Barbelo emerges by self-reflection from the Invisible Spirit in the *Apocryphon of John* and Barbelo's association there with the triad of attributes Aphtharsia, Aionia Zoe and Prognosis—one has only to proceed a little farther to the triad existence or being (incorruptible, unchanging, stable), vitality or life, and mentality or mind (cf. γνῶσις, or Barbelo's cognomen Ennoia) found in the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* (or even the triad ὑπόστασις, ἐνέργεια, and γνῶσις in *Marsanes*). The same might be said for the triad of Barbelo's subaeons Kalyptos (Hidden), Protophanes (First-appearing), and Autogenes (Self-generated, already the epithet for Barbelo's child in the *Apocryphon of John*). The philosophical nomenclature for these triads seems to have been derived from the exegesis of Plato's *Parmenides* and

τελής-παντελής) followed by five substantial ones: divinity (θειότης), substantiality (οὐσιότης), Truth (ἀλήθεια), Symmetry (συμμετρία), Good (ἀγαθόν). Θειότης and οὐσιότης also occur in the *Corpus Hermeticum XII*, 1 (and fragments 16 and 18).

23. Corrigan, *ibid.*, p. 160.

Sophist (esp. 248E) undertaken in various Middle Platonic sources, such as the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*, in somewhat the same way as the nomenclature of the earlier Sethian supreme triad Father-Mother-Child was likely derived from an interpretation of Plato's similarly-named triad in *Timaeus* 50D.

The conclusion to be drawn from the preceding observations is that the metaphysics of *Zostrianos* and perhaps *Allogenes* are dependent on neither Plotinus nor Porphyry or later sources, but on previous Middle Platonic sources that included a theological interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*, sources that may have included the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* itself as well as the negative theological sources common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus and to *Allogenes* and the *Apocryphon of John*. It is thus appropriate to investigate more closely the possible relationships between the Platonizing Sethian treatises and the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*.

IV. The Anonymous Parmenides Commentary and the Platonizing Sethian Treatises

In Chapter 9, Corrigan's arguments against a post-Plotinian and Porphyrian, and for a pre-Plotinian authorship of the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* were presented. 1) The features of Plotinus' doctrine of the One and his interpretation of the *Parmenides* are not original with him. 2) The *Commentary*'s two-states-of-intellect theory in which the One is an intelligible object possessing a content and special self-perception is much more comparable to Middle Platonic doctrine (the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Numenius, and Amelius) and the early Plotinus (III, 9 [13] 1 and perhaps V, 4 [7] 2, for which Plotinus was thought to have appropriated the ideas of Numenius, cf. *Vita Plotini* 17) than to Plotinus. 3) Despite the absence of the term ὕπαρξις in Plotinus, the structure of Intellect in its derivation from the One is comparable in both Plotinus and the *Commentary*, where ζωή appears as a middle term (an outgoing ἐνέργεια) between being as the highest unity of intellect pre-existing infinitivally in the One and the full unfolding of intellect proper in the *Enneads* (e.g., III, 8 [30] 8-10). 4) Plotinus' understanding of the generation of Intellect from the One is in fact similar to that of the *Commentary*, whose doctrine—that the Second One receives being from the "idea" of being which is the Second One's purely substantial vision

of the First One—presupposes the very sort of participation that both Syrianus and Proclus specifically deny to Porphyry. Thus the doctrines of the *Commentary* are perfectly compatible with Middle Platonist thought and also with some important passages in the *Enneads* which themselves in turn relate to earlier Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean doctrines.

Given the likelihood of a pre-Plotinian origin of *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, and the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*, a comparison of their doctrine of the emergence of a "second One" from the "First One" reveals a similarity—especially between *Allogenes* and frgs. XII and XIV of the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*—that is too striking to be coincidental. Such comparison shows that the Triple Powered One of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* corresponds almost precisely to the prefigurative existence of the *Commentary*'s "Second One" in the First.

According to *Allogenes*, the Triple Powered One is utterly transcendent; it is "always one," and prior to everything as source of all power and existence:

> **XI 47** [7] [Now] concerning [8] the invisible spiritual [9] Triple-Powered One, hear! He [exists] [10] as an invisible One, [11] incomprehensible to them all. [12] He contains them all within [himself], [13] for [they] all exist because [of] [14] [him]. He is perfect and [15] [greater] than perfect and he is [16] blessed, since he [is] [17] always one and [he] exists [18] [in] them all, being ineffable, [19] unnamable, [20] being [one] who exists [21] through them all ...

It is to be apprehended by a sort of transcendental thinking in which there is not just being but a hidden existence and the latent content of self-thinking or self-recognition:

> **XI 48** [6] It is not impossible for them] [7] to receive a revelation of these things [8] if they unify (in Protophanes), [9] since it is impossible that [10] the Individuals (in Autogenes) attain the All [11] [situated in the] place that is higher than perfect, [12] they at least share in it through [13] a preconception, [14] not, as it were, of Being—[rather] it is Being [15] with [the] hiddenness (cf. Kalyptos) of Existence that he (the Triple Powered One) provides, [16] [nourishing] [17] [it in] every way, since it is this [18] that [shall] come into being when he [19] intelligizes himself. For he is a Unity [20] subsisting as a [cause] [21] and source of [Being], even [an] [22] immaterial [matter and an] [23] innumerable [number and a] formless [24] [form] and a [shapeless] [25] [shape] and [a powerlessness with] [26] [power and an insubstantial substance] [27] [and a motionless] [28] [motion and an inactive] [29] [activity, but he is] [30] [a] provider of [agreement] [31] [and] a divinity [of] [32] divinity.

These lines are ambiguous: although they refer to the Triple Powered One, they do so in language that could refer either 1) to an utterly transcendent One (the Invisible Spirit) who transcends even intellect (the Barbelo Aeon), or 2) to its externalized power, the Triple Powered One as a sort of "second One" who is in some sense or other an intellect that can intelligize itself. Ultimately it does not matter, for both are so tightly coordinated that, at least initially, the two are one. In both the *Commentary* and *Allogenes* the Triple Powered One represents that transcendent moment or power in intellect which subsists as a cause and motionless motion, and is not coordinate with the rest of intellectual activity (XI 48, 20-33; cf. *In Parmenidem* XIII, 9-35):

> for it is dominated by nothing and formed by nothing else, being essentially impassible, essentially inseparable from itself, being neither intellection nor intelligible nor substance, but beyond everything and an <in>coordinate (<ἀ>σύζυγος) cause of everything. (*In Parmenidem* XIII, 18-23 Hadot 2.108)

According to *Allogenes*, as a "second One," the Triple Powered One participates in the first life and the undivided activity which is the existence (hypostasis) of the first One, and from which flows a second activity:

> **XI 48** [32] But when [33] they receive (this kind of Being), they share [34] in the primal Vitality and [35] an indivisible activity, [36] an hypostasis of the primary (activity) [37] of the One that [38] truly exists.

In the *Commentary* this "indivisible activity" is the impassible power of the First One from the viewpoint, as it were, of the potential individuals in the Second One's relation to the First:

> (Just as) there is a power that transcends them, that distinguishes their objects, that recognizes their identity and their difference, substance and condition, that can also be in contact with them all, using them as instruments because it is superior to them and transcends them all, so also one could say that the power according to which the intellect that cannot enter itself sees is different, superior to intellection and to the [common] notion (ἐπίνοια) of what is intelligized, and is beyond these two by its majesty and power (*Rep.* VI 509B). (*In Parmenidem* XIII, 30-XIV, 4)

At this point in the account of *Allogenes*, thinking appears as the movement of an indeterminate infinity or boundlessness of the Invisible Spirit:

> **XI 49** [7] when he (the Triple Powered One) [8] is intelligized as the Delimiter (D) [9] of the (indeterminate) Boundlessness (B) of the [10] Invisible Spirit (IS) [that subsists] in him (D), [11] it (B) causes [him (D)] to revert to [it (IS)] [12] in order that it (B) might know what it is [13] that is within it (IS) and [14] how it (IS) exists, and [15] that he (D) might guarantee the endurance of [16] everything by being a [17] cause (of determinateness) for those who truly exist (in the Barbelo Aeon). [18] For through him (D) [19] knowledge of it (IS) became available, [20] since he (D) is the one who knows what [21] it (IS) is. But they brought forth nothing [22] [beyond] themselves, neither [23] power nor rank nor [24] glory nor aeon, [25] for they are all [26] eternal. He is Vitality and [27] Mentality and Essentiality. [28] So then: Essentiality [29] constantly includes its [30] Vitality and Mentality, [31] and {Life has} [32] Vitality includes [33] {non} Substantiality and [34] Mentality; Mentality includes [35] Life and Essentiality. [36] And the three are one, [37] although individually they are three.

In its first moment of Essentiality, the Triple-Powered-One is identical with the Invisible Spirit insofar as this latter is boundlessness, i.e. pure infinitival activity. Thereupon the Triple-Powered-One delimits this boundlessness in a moment of Vitality (i.e. infinitival being in determination). Although indeterminate Vitality is the *moment* most truly characteristic of the Triple Powered One, here its most characteristic *function* seems to be that of delimitation: it sets a determinate limit upon infinitival being. Thus there are two actual things: 1) the Invisible Spirit, and 2) its positive image, which is "boundlessness" in the process of proceeding, that is, the true and actual Triple-Powered-One as life, a feminine, dyadic moment of incipient determination that is not yet fully determined but rather needs further determination. It is the moment between pure being and pure mind where that which has proceeded still has to be fully determined by turning back to its source in an act of knowledge. In terms of the *Parmenides Commentary*, there is now the ἕν of the ἓν ὄν of Plato's *Parmenides*, a secondary One that together with the first One forms a dyadic moment of life or vitality. By converting to its source and to itself (the reference in the text appears to be ambiguous), the secondary One comes to know itself as the content of the First One; as fully ἓν ὄν, it can thereupon become an origin and a cause of beings who are not productive in the same way. To be compared is the similar passage from *Zostrianos*:

> **VIII 16** [2] Not only [did they dwell] [3] in thought, but he [made room for] [4] them, since he is [Being] in the following [5] way: he set a [limit] upon [6] Being, lest it become [7] endless and formless; [8] yet it was truly delimited while it was a [9] new entity in order that [it] might become [10] something having [11]

its own [dwelling], [12] Existence together with [Being], [13] standing with it, existing with it, [14] surrounding it, [and being like it] [15] on every side.

The same notion of self-delimitation through self-knowledge also occurs in the nearly word-for-word parallel between *Zostrianos* and Victorinus' *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-23, where both authors depend upon a common source, which can be none other than a Middle Platonic commentary on the *Parmenides* (perhaps even the same as the anonymous Turin commentary). Here Victorinus glosses a portion of the common source (especially the phrase "the single, perfect Spirit") he shares with *Zostrianos*:

Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-23	*Zostrianos* VIII 64,13-23
49, [9] Before all the authentic existents was the One or the Monad or [10] One in itself, One before being was present to it... [15] he is thus [16] before every entity, substance, hypostasis, and before [17] all realities with even more potency. It is the One without existence, without substance, [18] <life>, or intellect—for it is beyond all that—	**64** [13] [He] was a [unity] [14] and a single one, [15] existing prior to [all those] [16] that truly exist (Cf. *Allogenes* XI 61,33-39, "*he acts without Mind or Life or Existence or Non-existence incomprehensibly*")

In these passages, the determinate being of the Barbelo Aeon results from the self-delimitation of the indeterminate infinity of the supreme One conceived as a kind of generative vitality or power of life, in which the prefigurative "Second One" inheres in the first as a triadic unity in which life, thought, and being are interrelated, as in the anonymous *Commentary*: "that which thinks—if Intellect passes from existence to that which thinks so as to return to the rank of an intelligible and see its (prefigurative) self—is in life"; cf. *In Parmenidem* XIV, 15-26, cited above, p. 698.

So too Plotinus conceives Intellect as deriving from an indeterminate life that is manifold, neither one nor simple, that passes away or shines forth as a trace of the One that becomes bounded by thinking or seeing its source:

> Intellect therefore had life and had no need of a giver full of variety, and its life was a trace of that Good and not his life. So when its life was looking towards that it was unlimited, but after it had looked there it was limited, though that Good has no limit. For immediately by looking to something which is one the life is limited by it, and has in itself limit and bound and form; and the form was in that which was shaped, but the shaper was shapeless. But the boundary is not from outside, as if it was surrounded by a largeness, but it was a bounding limit of all that life which is manifold and unbounded, as a life would be which shines out from a nature of this kind (πολλῆς καὶ ἀπείρου οὔσης, ὡς ἂν παρὰ τοιαύτης φύσεως ἐκλαμψάσης) ... and it was defined as many because of the multiplicity of its life, but on the other hand as one because of the defining limit. What then does "it was defined as one" mean? Intellect: for life defined and limited is intellect. And what "as many"? Many intellects. (*Ennead* VI, 7 [38] 17,6-43).

Here, Intellect's life is the trace of the giver, shining out from the One as "manifold and unbounded" that was (ἦν) indefinite in so far as it looks (βλέπουσα) to That, but having looked (βλέψασα) it became limited in itself without implying any limit in the One. Plotinus thus distinguishes phases or moments in the generation of intellect by distinctions in verbal tense and aspect within a single sentence,[24] rather than by a serial and schematic list of technical terms specially chosen to name the distinct phases such as one finds in the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* and the Platonizing Sethian treatises.

Marsanes, which does not employ the Existence-Vitality-Mentality terminology, conceives the Triple Powered One as an "otherness" or difference that pre-exists in the Invisible Spirit as pure act:

> **X 7** [1] When I had inquired about these things [2] I perceived that he (the Triple Powered One) acted (ἐνεργεῖν) [3] from silence. He exists [4] prior to those that [5] truly exist, that belong to the realm of Being. [6] He (the Triple

24. According to CORRIGAN ("The Anonymous Turin Commentary on the Parmenides and the Distinction between Essence and Existence in Middle Platonism, Plotinus' Circle, and Sethian Gnostic Texts,", manuscript, p. 46), "The tenses, imperfect, present, and aorist, are an interesting and typical feature of Plotinian discourse (E.g. VI, 7 (38) 16, 31-5; IV, 8 (6) 1, 1-11, etc.) which tends to distinguish by use of different tenses (often within a single, interlacing sentence) rather than by serial representation (such as we find in the *Commentary*). The effect is a sort of stereoscopic picture rather than a serial, planispheric representation. A particularly good example is VI, 7 (38) 16, 20-21: πληρωθεὶς μέν, ἵν' ἔχῃ, ὃ ὄψεται. It is worth noting that this technique, particularly that of the single interlacing sentence, runs right through the *Enneads*. The early V, 2 (11) 1, lines 7-13, effectively a single sentence, unites all the moments of generation in one complex thought process. By contrast, the approach in the anonymous *Commentary* is less subtle and more *seriatim*, which is a further indication that the *Commentary* is pre-Plotinian. By and large, Plotinus avoids schematic triads, for he is concerned to link the generative process and the dynamic nature of a hypostasis by means of a single thought pattern which articulates the complexity of the hypostasis."

> Powered One) is a pre-existent otherness [7] belonging to the one (the Invisible Spirit) that [8] actualizes (ἐνεργεῖν) the Silent One.

As we saw in Chapters 9 and 10, the notion that such an otherness in the One gives rise to the dyad is—according to Sextus Empiricus—at least Neopythagorean, and perhaps even originated from Plato's "unwritten" doctrine, and was later used by Plotinus to account for the rise of Intellect from the One. Similarly, the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* understands this otherness as a pure activity identical with the infinitival being of the supreme One that pre-exists the participial being of the second One:

> It has not been said that Being participates in the One, but that the One participates in Being (τὸ ὄν), not because the first was Being (τὸ ὄν), but because an otherness (ἑτερότης) from the One has turned the One towards this whole One-Being (τὸ ἓν εἶναι). For from the fact of being engendered somehow at the second level, being-One (τῶ ἓν εἶναι) is added.... the One, which is beyond substance and being (τὸ ὄν), is neither substance (οὐσία) nor act (ἐνέργεια), but rather acts (ἐνεργεῖ) and is itself pure act (ἐνεργεῖν), such that it is itself being (εἶναι) before determinate being (τὸ ὄν). By participating this being (the εἶναι of the first One; cf. *Parmenides* 137C-142A), the One (scil. "who is," i.e. the second One of *Parmenides* 142B-144E) possesses another being (εἶναι) declined from it (the εἶναι of the Supreme One), (106) which is (what is meant by) participating in determinate being (τὸ ὄν; cf. οὐσία in *Parmenides* 142B). Thus, being (εἶναι) is double: the one preexists determinate being (τὸ ὄν), while the other (ὄν) is derived from the One that is transcendent of determinate being (τὸ ὄν), who is absolute being (εἶναι) and as it were the idea of determinate being (τὸ ὄν) by participation in which (the εἶναι of the first) some other One has come to be to which is linked (σύζυγον) the being (εἶναι) carried over from it. (*In Parmenidem* XII, 16-35 [Hadot]; Greek text cited in Chapter 9, p. 397 n. 93)

Here, paronymns of the same lexeme are used to show that infinitival indetermination is to participial determination as εἶναι is to ὄν (and as ἐνεργεῖν is to ἐνέργεια). A similar distinction is made by Plotinus (*Ennead* III, 7 [45] 13,49-51; VI, 6 [34] 3,10-13; VI, 8 [39] 20,9-11) between ὑπόστασις (= ὕπαρξις) and ὄν or οὐσία and in *Allogenes* (XI 61,32-39, discussed in Chapter 12, p. 527)—using indicatives rather than infinitives—between ἐστί, ἔσται, ἐνεργεῖ, ζῇ, νοεῖ (ϥϣⲟⲟⲡ, ⲉϥⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ, ⲉϥⲣⲉⲛⲉⲣⲅⲓ, ⲉϥⲱⲛϧ, ⲉϥⲉⲓⲙⲉ) and ὕπαρξις, ζωή, νοῦς (ϩⲩⲡⲁⲣⲝⲓⲥ, ⲱⲛϧ, ⲛⲟⲩⲥ).

Despite minor differences in nomenclature, the structural and functional similarity of the being-life-thought triad in the *Parmenides Commentary* and the Existence-Vitality-Mentality triad in the Platonizing Sethian treatises is too striking to be coincidental. They and the *Commentary* understand the triad as the three phases by which a paradigmatic but indeterminate prefiguration of Being (τὸ εἶναι) resident in the supreme One becomes determinate Being (τὸ ὄν, or the Barbelo Aeon as divine Intellect). Like the *Commentary*, the *Three Steles of Seth* portrays the triad as a dynamic structure inherent in the second principle Barbelo, while *Zostrianos* tends to portray it as inherent in the supreme Invisible Spirit. *Allogenes* and *Marsanes* tend to confer a quasi-hypostatic status on the triad by identifying the Triple Powered One—or the Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit—primarily with its median processional phase (e.g., Vitality, Life, Activity) interposed between the supreme Unknowable One and the Aeon of Barbelo, thereby insuring the transcendence of the former, while also preventing any discontinuity in the chain of being.

Many of these ambiguities and variations in the Sethian implementation of these emanative schemes can be explained by postulating the dependence of these treatises on the doctrine of the *Commentary*, with its subtle distinctions between the First One, the prefigurative existence of the Second One in the First, and the resultant determinate being of the Second as "another" One, as well as its notion of a First One beyond being who nevertheless "contains" the prefigurative infinitival being (εἶναι) of the Second One who becomes defined as fully determinate Being (ὄν) and Intellect. A Sethian interpreter of the *Commentary* such as the author of *Zostrianos* would have identified the supreme First One of the *Commentary* as the Invisible Spirit, and the Second One as the Aeon of Barbelo. Furthermore, in earlier Sethian tradition, the Aeon of Barbelo had already been associated with some triad of attributes or modalities (Incorruptibility, Eternal Life, and Foreknowledge; Thought or Voice, Sound, and Word; Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes) of which the last two triplets represent modal progressions, whether of thought proceeding into articulate speech or hidden, potential existence proceeding into a manifest "self-generated" reality.

While the first and third terms of the Existence-Life-Intellection triad are easily identifiable with both the distinct Parmenidean First and Second Ones as well as with the Sethian figures of the Invisible Spirit and

the Barbelo Aeon (as the Invisible Spirit's First Thought), there was no obvious Sethian hypostatic equivalent for the median term Life—which has no clear hypostatic status in the *Commentary*—other than Barbelo's inherited attribute of "Eternal Life" in the *Apocryphon of John* and her role as source of the water of Life in the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. On the other hand, as previously discussed, among Middle Platonic sources other than the *Commentary*, the *Chaldaean Oracles* with its maternal figure of Hecate as source of life and the supreme Father's power that mediated between the transcendent Father and the second or demiurgic Intellect, may have suggested that the latent presence of Life in the Barbelo Aeon could be construed as a median, perhaps even quasi-hypostatic triadic principle, some kind of three-phase Power mediating between the supreme One and the Barbelo Aeon.

Such an entity could be conceived as the Barbelo Aeon in its three phases of deployment as in the *Three Steles of Seth*, or as somehow contained in the Triple Powered Invisible Spirit as in *Zostrianos*, or even as a distinct figure as in *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*. This ambiguity clearly could have been caused by the *Commentary*'s notion of the prefigurative existence of the Second One in the First who somehow contains or is "linked to" the prefigurative infinitival being (εἶναι) of the Second One and is the "idea" of second One's determinate being (ὄν) from which it is somehow "derived." The solution was evidently to identify this "idea" or prefigurative infinitival being of the Second One resident in the First One with a distinct principle, a Triple Power of Existence, Life, and Intellection, whose median term, perhaps after the analogy of the Chaldaean Hecate, could be conceived alternatively as inherent in the Father, inherent in the Intellect-Barbelo Aeon, or as a distinct power whose central modality was Life, or more abstractly, Vitality.[25]

But as we shall see, *Zostrianos*—and later on, Victorinus—also utilized another Middle Platonic exegesis of the *Parmenides*—distinct from and perhaps a source for the anonymous *Commentary* itself—that nearly equates, but ultimately distinguishes between the First One and the "Spirit," so that the author of *Zostrianos* identified the Invisible Spirit with the Triple Powered One, in effect equating the "Triple Powered Invisible Spirit" with the infinitival being of the *Commentary*'s Second

25. Such triads express continuity between extreme terms, since the median term shares the character of the first and last in the division into complementaries A, not-A (contrary of A), and the median, A *and* not-A.

One prefigured in the First. In this way, he tends to distinguish the erstwhile supreme Invisible Spirit from a more transcendent first One, a tendency at work also in *Allogenes*, and finally culminating in *Marsanes* with its Unknown Silent One beyond both the Invisible Spirit and Triple Powered One.

Concerning these similarities between the Sethian treatises and the *Parmenides Commentary*, Corrigan concludes:

> Quite apart from the application of the predominance principle which appears in a different form in the *Commentary*, it is my contention that the above passage [*Allogenes* XI 48,6-49,37, cited p. 727 above] must be dependent either upon the *Commentary* itself or upon some similar version of it, for the structure of the thought in both is strikingly similar and the ultimate provenance of that thought must be Platonic-Pythagorean (given the emergence of a second One as an indefinite movement which by conversion knows both itself and its principle). This is not to say that *Allogenes* is simply derivative. On the contrary, *Allogenes* reveals itself to be so perfectly at home in this Platonic milieu that it can adapt and thoroughly shape details to its own purpose. Nonetheless, the simplest hypothesis to explain the similarity between the two texts is that Allogenes is dependent upon the *Commentary* but in such a way that the Platonic tradition is not something alien, but its own. This does not mean, however, that *Allogenes* is necessarily pre-Plotinian. Some of the elements in this passage, particularly the idea that there are intelligible beings who bring forth nothing beyond themselves, seem to me very much linked to ideas in Amelius and Plotinus ... Nonetheless, I argue that, on balance, *Allogenes* is most likely to be the work referred to by Porphyry in the *Vita Plotini* and replied to in part by Plotinus in the first three treatises of the *Großschrift*. It makes a lot more sense, therefore, to suppose that Plotinus' adaptation of philosophical motifs in *Allogenes* (themselves probably influenced by Middle Platonic thought: the *Chaldaean Oracles*, for instance: retreat, looking both ways etc.) is part of the creation of a complex, subtle appeal to people who, like him, were already familiar with these works.

> For a different reason I date the Platonizing Sethian Gnostic texts after the *Commentary*. The triadic schema of the *Commentary* is relatively simple and both major versions of it (Existence-Life-Thought/Being-Vitality-Mentality) clearly relate to Middle Platonic preoccupations as evinced particularly in Albinus, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and the Neopythagoreans. In the Sethian Gnostic texts, there is some evidence of the same sort of linking of moments we have found in Amelius (see especially *Zostrianos* VIII 15,1-20; 17,1-5; cf. *Chaldaean Oracles* fragment 4), and in addition there is much more variety and proliferation of triads, an indication that the Sethian Gnostics are working innovatively, and according to the already established Gnostic manner, with an earlier Platonic tradition. ("The

> Anonymous Turin Commentary on the Parmenides and the Distinction between Essence and Existence in Middle Platonism, Plotinus' Circle, and Sethian Gnostic Texts," manuscript, 36, 46)
>
> Consequently a Middle Platonic authorship for the anonymous *Commentary* is the simplest and most plausible hypothesis on the basis of both the direct and the indirect evidence. So the *Anon. Commentary* cannot have been written by Porphyry; but the most reasonable interpretation of the evidence is that the fragments of the *Commentary* we possess were a common source both for the Gnostics and for Plotinus, Amelius, and Porphyry (which does not automatically preclude further "exchanges of ideas" or further redactions of the Gnostic texts we now possess). Whatever the case might actually have been, and however many revisions might have been made to these Gnostic treatises before their eventual burial in the Egyptian desert, the texts we possess are (1) most likely to be *in nuce* what Plotinus, Amelius, and Porphyry actually read and (2) to have been dependent upon some earlier or contemporary Platonic commentary on the *Parmenides* such as was also available and read in the Plotinian school.... we simply do not know who the author was; and this has the virtue of keeping it "anonymous," while placing it in the general Platonist-Neopythagorean milieu of the late second or early third century, which would provide sufficient time for it to have exerted the influence it certainly appears to have had on the Platonizing Gnostic texts.[26]

On balance, I am persuaded that, rather than being post-Plotinian or even post-Porphyrian, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* are contemporary with or slightly prior to Plotinus' *floruit* in Rome, where he knew their content and engaged in a critical dialogue with them and their proponents in his "antignostic" *Großschrift* and subsequent works. Corrigan holds that they are to be placed before the *Großschrift* but after the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*, whose schemata (Existence-Life-Thought or Being-Vitality-Mentality) are relatively simple Middle Platonic constructions in comparison to the greater variety and number of triads in the Sethian texts. Moreover, the comparatively elementary distinction maintained in both the *Commentary* and the Sethian texts between pure,

26. K. CORRIGAN, "The Anonymous Turin Commentary on the Parmenides and the Distinction between Essence and Existence in Middle Platonism, Plotinus' Circle, and Sethian Gnostic Texts," manuscript of 1996, p. 46-48, summarized in "Platonism and Gnosticism: The Anonymous *Commentary* on the *Parmenides*, Middle or Neoplatonic?" in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. J. D. Turner and R. Majercik (SBL Symposium Series 12; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 155-161.

unqualified existence ("infinitival being") and the realm of determinate being may have prompted Plotinus to devote the *Großschrift* and subsequent treatises to the clarification and extension of various Middle Platonic attempts to explain the *Timaeus*' picture of the relation between the intelligible and sensible realms. In this way he developed an "intelligible biology" (K. Corrigan's term) derived from Aristotle's analysis of thinking to show how the vitality of the sensible world was already prefigured in the divine intellect.

Among the Platonizing Sethian texts, *Marsanes* and the *Three Steles of Seth* do not seem to be mentioned in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* 16 as circulating in Plotinus' circle, although it does mention a revelation of Nicotheos, a figure that is mentioned in the Bruce Codex (*Untitled*, Ch. 7) in concert with another figure named Marsanes. This suggests that *Marsanes* may predate the untitled text of the Bruce Codex, and if indeed its doctrine of an Unknown Silent One beyond the supreme Invisible Spirit reflects a similar doctrine found in Iamblichus and his pupil Theodore of Asine (see Chapter 10), it may be dated to around 300-325 CE, after *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. The position of the *Three Steles of Seth* relative to the other three is even more indeterminate, as the title does not seem to be echoed in any ancient *testimonia*. If anything, it is closer in terminology and spirit to *Allogenes*, yet it seems to preserve more of the basic Sethian *dramatis personae* than the latter, such as Pigeradamas and Emacha Seth. It reflects the ascensional praxis of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, but without the transcendental baptismal schemata that one finds in *Zostrianos*. Of all four treatises, its portrayal of the emergence of Barbelo from the Invisible Spirit is extremely close to Moderatus' (late first century) account of the emergence of Quantity within his second 'One.' On the whole, I would tend to view it as contemporary with *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, but earlier than *Marsanes* and the untitled treatise of the Bruce Codex.

Most of the metaphysical schemes appearing in the Platonizing Sethian treatises are best understood as attempts to relate the beings typically found in the Sethian mythological theogonies to the schemata developed by Neopythagorean and Middle Platonic exegetes of Plato's *Timaeus*, *Philebus*, and *Parmenides*. Their basic speculations concerning the relation between unity and multiplicity and between infinitival being and determinate being seem betray a Middle Platonic tradition of *Parmenides* interpretation sufficiently well-established as to be available

for consumption by informed Sethian intellectuals concerned with maps of invisible reality that could illustrate ever new ways of appropriating older Sethian traditions.

In view of the likely chronological priority of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* to many of the *Enneads*, at least to those following the *Großschrift* (especially its conclusion in *Ennead* II, 9 [33] which seems to presuppose the terminology and conceptuality of these Sethian texts), it is possible that they are to be included among the sources that influenced the derivational scheme by which Plotinus accounted for the generation of Intellect from the One. Other non-Sethian sources such as the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary*, given their Platonic affiliation, are also equally likely candidates for such sources. Of course, one must also include here not only certain of the Platonizing Sethian texts, but also their yet earlier sources, such as the negative-theological source shared in common by *Allogenes* and the *Apocryphon of John*, which features an unexplained triad of Divinity, Blessedness, and Perfection, as well as a distinct source shared in common between *Zostrianos* and Victorinus' *Adversus Arium* (written around the years 359-360) which features the Existence-Life-Blessedness triad.

V. Marius Victorinus and the Platonizing Sethian Treatise *Zostrianos*

In Chapter 12, we cited these two negative theologies (each supplemented by a series of positive affirmations about the One's identity as a threefold Spirit) that share a nearly word-for-word similarity: one is the word-for-word parallel between the *Apocryphon of John* II 3,17-33 and *Allogenes* XI 62,28-63,25 (Chapter 12, pp. 503 ff.), and the other is the word-for-word parallel between *Zostrianos* VIII 64,13-66,11 + 66,14b-68,13 + 74,17-75,21 and Marius Victorinus' *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-50,21 (Chapter 12, pp. 505 ff.). Each in their own way, these sources both appear to have drawn upon a common fund of tradition, most likely some kind of Middle Platonic commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, especially its first hypothesis, 137C-142A. While the *Apocryphon of John* and *Allogenes* offer a negative theology followed by a subsequent affirmative theology, *Zostrianos* and Victorinus artfully weave the two together.

Now in the negative theological portion of this common source (Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* I.49,9-23 and *Zostrianos* VIII 64,13-23), Victorinus identifies the supreme One merely as an immeasurable and invisible One or Monad, while the parallel in *Zostrianos* identifies this One as "immeasurable Spirit" (VIII 64,17). But then Victorinus goes on to supplement his negative theology in I.49,9-40—which does *not* identify the One with the Spirit—with an affirmative theology of the threefold character of One in *Adversus Arium* I.50,1-21, which—together with the parallel in *Zostrianos* (VIII 66,22-67,11; 75,7-25)—quite freely designates the One as the Spirit:

Adversus Arium I.50,1-8; 16-21	*Zostrianos* VIII 66,22-67,11; 75,7-25
I.50 [1] This (One) is God, this is the Father, pre-intelligence preexisting [2] and preexistence preserving itself in its own Blessedness and a motionless [3] motion and, because of this, [4] having no need of other beings; perfect beyond perfect things, a Spirit triple powered in [5] its unity, perfect Spirit and Spirit beyond spirit; for he does not [6] breathe, but rather it is the Spirit in that which is his being, Spirit [7] breathing toward itself so that it is Spirit, since the Spirit [8] is not separate from itself.	**VIII 66** [22] Whomever he will find [23] he brings into [24] being. [And in] [25] Vitality, he is alive [and becomes;] **67** [1] [in Blessedness] [2] [he comes to] [3] [have Mentality]. [4] [And he] knows [that] all these [5] [become] uniquely him, [6] for [no] divinity [7] [is concerned with anything] except [what] [8] [is his] alone, and he [exists] [9] [alone] in himself [with] [10] [himself], the single, [perfect] [11] [Spirit].
I.50 [16] It has its life and act [17] in its own Existence which is [18] not Existence; union without distinction of the Spirit with itself, divinity, [19] substantiality, blessedness, mentality, vitality, goodness, [20] being absolutely all things in a universal mode, purely unengendered, preexisting, [21] unity of union which is not itself union.	**VIII 75** [7] In Existence [8] [is] Being; in [Vitality] [9] <is> Life; and in [10] perfection and [11] [Mentality] is Blessedness. [12] All [these] were existing [13] [in the] indivisibility of [14] [the] Spirit. And it is Mentality [15] on account of [which] is [16] [Divinity] and [Insubstantiality] [17] and Blessedness [18] and Life and [19] Mentality and Goodness. [20] And Henad [21] and Unity, and all these absolutely [23] preexist the purity of the ingenerateness, [24] that is, [25] all these and the […

Given the probable derivation of this common material from a commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, there arises a problem: as both P. Hadot and

M. Tardieu point out in their study of these striking parallels,[27] the term "spirit" was a standard designation for the Stoic universal Logos immanent in the physical cosmos and for a "pure Platonist" commentator on the *Parmenides*, the term "spirit" would be a too materialistic, and thus highly unlikely as an equivalent for the One.[28] As noted, the term

27. M. TARDIEU, "Recherches sur la formation de l'Apocalypse de Zostrien et les sources de Marius Victorinus," 7-114, and P. HADOT, "Porphyre et Victorinus. Questions et hypothèses," 117-125, in *Res Orientales IX* (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l'Étude de la Civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 1996); L. BRISSON, "The Platonic Background in the *Apocalypse of Zostrianos*," in *The Tradition of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon*, ed. J. J. Cleary (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 173-188; for further discussion and an updated text, see my "Introduction" and "Commentaire," in C. Barry, W.-P. Funk, P.-H. Poirier, J. D. Turner, *Zostrien (NH VIII, 1)* (Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, section « Textes » 24; Québec and Leuven-Paris: Presses de l'Université Laval and Éditions Peeters, 2000), 32-225; 483-662.

28. So HADOT, "Questions et Hypothèses," 124-125; cf. TARDIEU, "Formation," 114. R. MAJERCIK ("The Existence-Life-Intellect Triad in Gnosticism and Neoplatonism," *Classical Quarterly* 42 [1992], 475-488) points out that in *Porphyre et Victorinus* (1.297), Hadot notes that none of the later Neoplatonists ever uses the name πνεῦμα as a substitute for the Chaldaean πατήρ, and suggests that Victorinus' use of "Spirit" in this instance may not derive from a Neoplatonic source. L. ABRAMOWSKI ("Marius Victorinus, Porphyrius und die römischen Gnostiker," *ZNW* 74 (1983), 108-128) suggests that Porphyry has borrowed the term Spirit from the Gnostics, noting in particular the expression *tripotens in unalitate spiritus* in *Adv. Arium* I.50,4-5 (i.e., "triple powerful Invisible Spirit" in *Zostrianos*, VIII 87,13-14 etc.), but since Porphyry (e.g., *Sententiae* 29 Lamberz; *De regressu animae*, § 7 Bidez) uses the term πνεῦμα principally in connection with *Chaldaean Oracles*' (frgs. 61, 104, 120, 129, 158, 201) doctrine of the soul's 'breath' or 'vehicle' (ὄχημα-πνεῦμα), the "spiritual envelope" or "astral body" acquired by the soul in its earthly descent, Porphyry would hardly have used this term to describe the First Principle, whether as a 'Stoicization' of Chaldaean terminology (Hadot) or as a gnostic adaptation (Abramowski). Even so, if Victorinus found the term πνεῦμα as an equivalent for πατήρ in Porphyry's exegesis of the *Oracles*, why is there no trace of this usage among the later Neoplatonists? Majercik argues that unless Victorinus found this terminology in a source independent of Porphyry, the best explanation is that he equated πνεῦμα and πατήρ in *Adv. Arium* I.50 in order to reconcile Chaldaean and Christian concepts (as in *Ad Candidum* 1.6-8 where he equates the Chaldaean "Paternal Intellect" with the "Spirit" who has "sent forth symbols from all eternity which are engraved in the soul," *animae nostrae* νοῦς πατρικός *et spiritus de super missus figurationes intellegentiarum inscriptas*, a paraphrase of the *Oracles* frg. 108, σύμβολα γὰρ πατρικὸς νόος ἔσπειρεν κατὰ κόσμον, where the Paternal Intellect is said to have "sown symbols in the souls"). Thus the "Spirit triple powered in its unity" of *Adversus Arium* I.50,4-5 is equivalent not to the *Oracle*'s supreme Paternal Intellect *per* se, but to the *prefiguration* of the Second Intellect from whom the Father "snatched himself away" (frg. 3) to give rise to the Second Intellect. As we shall see, Majercik's alternative, namely that Victorinus "found this terminology in a source independent of Porphyry" is the correct solution: the source was not Porphyry, but a non-Christian, Middle Platonic source common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus.

"Spirit" occurs in the negative theology of *Zostrianos* (VIII 64,17), but is not present in Victorinus' initial negative theology (I.49,9-40), which raises the question of whether it was present in the common source: does the identification of the One with Spirit stem from the source common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus? Or was it added by the author of *Zostrianos*, as Tardieu thinks? Or was it added to a Christian or Gnostic revision of the common source that was used by both, as Hadot thinks?

A similar issue arises in the case of the *Apocryphon of John* (II 2,26-33), where the introductory theology of the Invisible Spirit is actually expounded as a negative and positive theology of the Monad in a passage that precedes the passage containing word-for-word agreements with similar material in *Allogenes* XI 62,28-63,25. Here the Monad of the original source is glossed as "Father," "Invisible One," and "Invisible Spirit":

> **II 2** [26] The Monad [27] [is a monarchy] over which there is [nothing. [28] It is he who exists as God] and Father of [29] [the All, the Invisible One] who is over [30] [the All, who exists in] the Incorruptibility that is [31] [in the Pure Light], into which no [32] [eye can] gaze. [33] [He is] the Invisible [Spirit.]

This problem leads Hadot ("Questions et Hypothèses," 125) to suppose that the entire source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos* was Middle Platonic and originally contained no reference to the Spirit, but was subsequently re-edited by a Christian or Gnostic glossator who inserted references to the Spirit, not into the initial negative and superlative theology—where such glosses would be inappropriate to an exposition of the One—but into the positive theology that followed it (esp. *Adversus Arium* I.50,1-8). It would have been this edited version of the common source that was used by both *Zostrianos* and Victorinus.

But would Victorinus have utilized a recognizably Gnostic source? Tardieu believes that Victorinus knew nothing of Gnosticism, since in *Adversus Arium* I.16,1-2 he includes the Christian Gnostic Valentinus among his own Arian opponents ("Formation," 111). But Hadot—observing that many Gnostic ideas had been adopted by anti-Arians—thinks that the presence of gnosticizing notions in the redacted common source would not have deterred Victorinus from adopting it. Given that

the versions of the common source represented by *Zostrianos* and Victorinus each introduce the term "Spirit" at different locations in the text, it may be that the term either was not present in the original source, or was omitted by Victorinus in the first part (I.49,19-20), or was present only in the second part of the source (VIII 67,10-11 and *Adversus Arium* I.50,5-8.18, especially the term *in unalitate spiritus perfectus* ≅ ⲡⲓ-ⲟⲩⲱⲧ ⲛ̄[ⲧⲉⲗⲓⲟⲥ ⲙ̄ⲡⲛ̄ⲁ]; here the original source seems to have understood "spirit" as an aspect indistinguishable from the One rather than being the One *per se*. While the text of *Zostrianos* ("and he [exists alone] in himself [with himself], the single, [perfect Spirit]") identifies "spirit" as a supraeidetic unity of the One ("Henad") "with" whom the One inseparably (i.e., as a "single" Spirit) exists, Victorinus glosses the term "spirit" as designating the inward breathing of the One's being (*in eo quod est ei esse*) which is "inseparable" from the One. Thus, it appears that the term "spirit" stood in the source, where it seems to be the equivalent of the pure infinitival being (εἶναι) attributed to the supreme One by the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* XII, 31-35: "the One that transcends determinate being (τὸ ὄν) is absolute being (εἶναι) and as it were the idea of determinate being by participation in which some other (i.e., the second) One has come to be to which is linked the being (εἶναι) carried over from it (the First One)."

Both the source and its users distinguish the One from its Spirit. The author of *Zostrianos* took it to be a close equivalent of the One quite conformable with Sethian tradition, while Victorinus agonized over the somewhat anthropomorphic "breathing" it may have implied and may have therefore omitted the term in the initial negative theology. In the Middle Platonic common source, "spirit" may have been borrowed from Stoic thought to signify the existence within the One of a tensile movement (ἡ τοῦ πνεύματος φύσις καὶ ἡ τονικὴ κίνησις, Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* IV.55,7-8), directed alternately outward to produce determination and inward to produce cohesion and unity (*SVF* II.451 = Nemesius, *De nat. hom.* II.42), and thus a precursor to the Neoplatonic doctrines of procession and reversion.[29] Nevertheless, both authors let the term stand. It is even conceivable that, at a later time, Theodore of Asine (see Chapter 10) may have used this same common source with its distinctive use of the term "spirit" as an explanation for the origin of his second "One":

29. See P. HADOT, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, 1.225-234.

> After this One, transcendent above all, comes a triad defining the intelligible level (νοητὸν πλάτος), which he calls the One (*hen*), who derives from 1) the breathing that somehow pertains to the *spiritus lenis* [of the supreme One's] ineffability (ἄρρητον), imitated by the *spiritus asper* of "the one" (ἕν), 2) from just the arch of the letter ε alone without the following consonant ν, and 3) lastly the letter ν. (Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria* II.274,18-23)

What is truly striking is that Victorinus in I.49,19-20 assigns the epithets "invisible" and "indiscernible" to the Spirit, while *Zostrianos* VIII 64,17 has "immeasurable" and "indiscernible," but omits the epithet "invisible," even though "Invisible Spirit" is the standard Sethian designation for the supreme One and even though the term "invisible" was very likely included in the common source. Interestingly, the term "immeasurable," frequently an attribute of the Invisible Spirit in Sethian texts,[30] is used by both authors; in fact Plotinus (*Ennead* V, 5 [32] 4,12-14) himself applied it to his first hypostasis (the One), just as Plato also applied it to the One in the *Parmenides* (140C3; 140D4-5).

Furthermore, at the beginning of their affirmative expositions, both authors explain the threefold character of the One as containing Existence, Life, and Blessedness (*Adversus Arium* I.50,11-12; *Zostrianos* VIII 66,14-20). As Tardieu ("'Formation," 101) notes, it is most significant that this doctrine of the triad Existence, Life, and Blessedness residing in the simple unity of the One occurs in what must have been a Middle Platonic source common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus. Indeed, both Victorinus and *Zostrianos* (and *Allogenes* XI 49,26-37!)—and therefore their common source—knew and used the doctrine of the mutual inclusion of these three powers each in one another according to the dictum ascribed by Iamblichus to Numenius, "All things are in all things, but in each thing appropriately in accord with its own essence."[31] Scattered throughout *Zostrianos* and explicitly present in Victorinus' version of

30. See *Apocryphon of John* II 3,17; *Allogenes* XI 45,15; Codex Bruce, *Untitled* 232,7; 241,6; 243,24; 245,25; 247,4, 265,4 [Schmidt-MacDermot]; cf. *Eugnostos* III 72,21-22, cited in Chapter 12, n. 7.

31. According to Stobaeus, *Anthology* I.49.32,68-71: ἐν πᾶσιν πάντα ἀποφαίνονται. οἰκείως μέντοι κατὰ τὴν αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ἐν ἑκάστοις; cf. Porphyry, *Sententiae* 10 and Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 103 [Dodds]; Syrianus, *In Metaphy.* 82.1-2 ascribes this saying to the "Pythagoreans."

the common source,[32] this is the first known systematic presentation of this doctrine in religio-philosophical literature. Although Victorinus' example of each power's mutual inclusion of the other two is restricted to the inclusion of Vitality and Blessedness in Existence, the excerpt from *Allogenes*, contemporary with *Zostrianos*, gives the full cyclic permutation.[33]

On the grounds that *Zostrianos* was circulated and read in Plotinus' Roman seminar (Porphyry, *Vita Plotini* 16), and depended on a *Parmenides* commentary that must also be pre-Plotinian, Tardieu ("Formation," 100-101; 112) argues that "the totality of *Zostrianos*—whose content we know through the Coptic version in the Nag Hammadi Codices—was already written in 263, at the time of the arrival of the Gnostics in the School of Plotinus." What is more,[34] it appears that the

32. *Adversus Arium* I.50,14-15: *hoc est exsistentiae, potentia vitae et beatitudinis; quo enim est et exsistit, potentia quae sit exsistentiae, hoc potentia est et vitae beatitudinis.*

33. XI 49,26-37 cited above, p. 727, to be compared with the precise parallel in Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 103 and Victorinus, *Adversus Arium* IV.21,26-22,6: τριδύναμος *est deus, id est tres potentias habens, esse, vivere, intellegere, ita ut in singulis tria sint.*

34. M. TARDIEU, "Formation," 100-101: "Ainsi que le note Pierre Hadot (*Porphyre et Victorinus*, II, p. 91,2), la formule *simplicitate unus qui sit tres potentias couniens* [*Adversus Arium* 50,10] se retrouve textuellement dans le *Commentaire au Parménide*, qu'il attribue à Porphyre, IX 4: ἐν τῇ ἁπλότητι αὐτοῦ συνηνῶσθαι. Voici ce passage: « D'autres, bien qu'ils affirment qu'Il (le Père) s'est lui-même dérobé à toutes les choses qui sont à Lui, concèdent néanmoins que sa puissance et son intellect sont co-unifiés dans sa simplicité » (IX 1-4, trad. Hadot, p. 91). L'expression οἱ εἰπόντες désigne les *Oracles chaldaiques*, puisque la première partie de la tradition qui leur est attribuée, ἁρπάσαι ἑαυτόν est une citation de l'oracle 3,1: ὁ πατὴρ ἥρπασεν ἑαυτόν. Dans la seconde partie de cette tradition, δύναμίν τε αὐτῷ διδόασι καὶ νοῦν ἐν τῇ ἁπλότητι συνηνῶσθαι, l'auteur présumé du *Commentaire*, autrement dit Porphyre, n'utilise plus la terminologie chaldaïque mais celle de l'exposé (*in simplicitate couniens*) pour interpréter le second vers du même oracle 3, connu par Psellos (= oracle 33 chez Pléthon, ed. Tambrun-Krasker, pp. 4, 18 et 147-150): οὐδ' ἐν ἑῇ δυνάμει νοερᾷ κλείσας ἴδιον πῦρ. Par conséquent, force est de constater que les témoignages cités disent tous les trois la même chose: 1) l'exposé commun à Marius Victorinus et au *Zostrien*, affirme d'abord que l'Esprit est *in semet ipso manens, solus in solo* (50,9) puis énonce le contraire, à savoir que l'Esprit co-unifie dans sa simplicité les trois puissances de l'existence, de la vie et de la béatitude (50,10-11); 2) selon le fr. 3 des *Oracles chaldaïques*, pareillement, le Père à la fois s'est dérobé (= reste seul) et n'enferme pas dans sa puissance le feu qui lui est propre, il ne reste donc pas seul et se déploie; 3) Porphyre, enfin, affirme, avec les *Oracles*, que l'Un se dérobe, et, avec l'exposé, que sa puissance est co-unifiée dans la simplicité. Ces trois témoignages coincident mais révèlent aussi une histoire. Dès lors, en effet, que l'auteur du *Commentaire au Parménide* réunit dans la même exégèse deux formules, l'une appartenant aux *Oracles chaldaïques*, l'autre à l'exposé, ces deux documents sont donc les sources de cet auteur, antérieures à lui et tenues par lui comme textes fondateurs. De la même façon qu'il est peu crédible qu'il y ait identité d'auteur entre 2 et 3, l'hypothèse d'une identité d'auteur entre 1 et 3 paraît, comme nous l'avons déjà vu, difficilement envisageable en raison même de la dénomination d'Esprit (Pneuma) donnée à l'Un-Père par l'exposé."

anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* that Hadot has attributed to Porphyry contains a statement[35] that depends upon *both* the *Chaldaean Oracles*[36] *and* the theological source common to Victorinus[37] and *Zostrianos*,[38] indicating that the common source predates even the anonymous *Commentary*. Taken together, these factors suggest 1) that several commentaries on the *Parmenides* were available in the late second century, 2) that they were pre-Plotinian and Middle Platonic (Tardieu suggests Numenius), 3) that they were used by the version of *Zostrianos* known to Plotinus, and 4) that the anonymous Turin *Commentary* need not necessarily be ascribed to Porphyry, but is to be dated earlier, before Plotinus. Combined with Corrigan's argument for the pre-Plotinian origin of the anonymous *Parmenides* commentary, Tardieu's claim—that the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* depends on *both* the *Chaldaean Oracles and* the common source presently embedded in Victorinus and *Zostrianos*—makes a strong case indeed that the *Commentary* is not by Porphyry, but is a product of Middle Platonic *Parmenides* interpretation.

Furthermore, given the strong likelihood that *Allogenes* circulated in Plotinus' Roman seminar long before Victorinus' *floruit*, it is also likely that his description of the Essentiality-Vitality-Mentality triad in *Adversus Arium* IV.5

> Thus ὀντότης, that is existentiality or essentiality, or ζωότης, that is vitality, that is the primary power of universal life, that is the primary life and

35. *In Parm.* frg. IX 1-4: "Others, although they affirm that He has robbed himself of all that which is his, nevertheless concede that his power and intellect are co-unified in his simplicity."

36. *Chaldaean Oracles* frg. 3: "the Father snatched himself away and did not enclose his own fire in his intellectual Power" (trans. Majercik).

37. Esp. *Adversus Arium* I.50,10: "Since he is one in his simplicity, containing three powers: all Existence, all Life, and Blessedness."

38. Esp. VIII 66,14-20: "For they are [triple] powers of his [unity: complete] Existence, Life and Blessedness ... he exists [as] a simple unity."

> source of living for all things, and likewise νοότης, the force, virtue, power, or substance or nature of thought, these powers, then, must be understood as three in one, but such that one names them and defines their proper being by the aspect according to which each has a predominating property. For there is none of them that is not triple, since being is being only if it lives, that is, is in life; likewise living: there is no living that lacks knowledge of the act of living. Appearing as a mixture, in reality they are simple, but with a simplicity that is triple. (*Adversus Arium* IV.5,36-45 Henri-Hadot)

is dependent either upon *Allogenes* XI 49,26-37

> **XI 49** [26] He (the Triple Powered One) is Vitality and [27] Mentality and Essentiality. [28] So then, Essentiality [29] constantly includes its [30] Vitality and Mentality, [31] and [32] Vitality includes [33] Substantiality and [34] Mentality; Mentality includes [35] Life and Essentiality. [36] And the three are one, [37] although individually they are three.

or upon a common source whose doctrine was much like that of the anonymous *Parmenides Commentary* (cited below, p. 698).

Zostrianos and *Allogenes*, together with the closely-related *Three Steles of Seth*, clearly indicate that the metaphysical doctrine of a supreme unity-in-trinity, whose nature could only be described in largely negative terms, was not a post-Plotinian and therefore Neoplatonic invention, but already played a role in the thought of the Sethian Gnostics and certain Middle Platonic interpreters of Plato's *Parmenides*. This same doctrine subsequently found its way into the anti-Arian treatises of Marius Victorinus. Thus Willy Theiler's long-standing working hypothesis[39]—that every Neoplatonic but non-Plotinian doctrine found simultaneously in Augustine and in a late Neoplatonist must derive from Porphyry—needs modification; Porphyry may indeed be the most immediate, but not necessarily the originating source. For it appears that the trinitarian theology bequeathed to Augustine by his teacher Marius Victorinus had its metaphysical basis, not exclusively in Porphyry or later Neoplatonists, but also in the pre-Plotinian Middle Platonic philosophy of the sort best preserved in the Platonizing Sethian treatises from Nag Hammadi.

39. W. THEILER, *Porphyrios und Augustin* (Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft, Geistwissenschaftliche Kl., X, 1; Halle [Saale]: M. Niemeyer, 1933, 1-74).

CONCLUSION
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SETHIAN RELIGION

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CONCLUDING OVERVIEW OF SETHIAN RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT

I. Sethian Treatises of the Descent and Ascent Pattern

It is now time to stand aside from the detailed analysis of the Sethian treatises in relation to one another and to their Jewish, Christian, and Platonic environment, and conclude with a brief overview of some of the main points of this study. At the very least, I hope that this study has confirmed the existence of the Sethian movement as a hitherto unrecognized religious competitor of early Christianity that had its own roots in second temple Judaism and was an active participant the Platonic philosophical discourse of those times. Sethianism is now the earliest gnostic movement for which we possess a great deal of textual evidence, apparently antedating and forming a partial source for another equally well-documented form of Gnosticism, the Christian school of Valentinus (120-160 CE) and his followers.

In Chapters 3-5, I divided the corpus of Sethian treatises into two groups, depending on how they portray the advent of salvific enlightenment: either as a gift conferred through the earthly descent of transcendent beings, or as a self-actualized assimilation to transcendent realities encountered during the heavenly ascent of a visionary. Those treatises featuring the pattern of visionary ascent are the four treatises *Zostrianos*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Allogenes*, and *Marsanes*, while all the others—the *Apocryphon of John*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Thought of Norea*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Melchizedek*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and the Untitled text of the Bruce Codex—feature some variant of a descending revealer. Furthermore, the last four chapters have shown that all four "ascent pattern" treatises contain a distinctive implementation of Middle Platonic metaphysics not found in the other treatises; hence I refer to them as the "Platonizing Sethian treatises."

The designation "Platonizing Sethian treatises" is not intended to deny in any way the vital influence of Platonism throughout the entire

Sethian corpus. Even the Sethian treatises of the descent pattern exhibit the influence of Platonic doctrine: they distinguish the earthly, visible realm of change and becoming from a transcendent, invisible realm of permanence and stability, and make much use of the associated doctrines of archetype/image and model/copy. And their portrayal—often a parody—of the world creator is broadly patterned, not only on the initial chapters of Genesis, but also on the demiurgic figure of Plato's *Timaeus*. But only the four Platonizing treatises feature a method of enlightenment through a visionary ascent that is designed to reascend the chain of being generated by the original emanation of the Barbelo Aeon from the Triple Power of the supreme deity. That is, their approach to enlightenment directly presupposes their distinctive ontology and emanative theogony.

Furthermore, there is an element of both ascent and descent in all the Sethian treatises. The "ascent pattern" treatises narrate the ascent of an exemplary visionary who achieves enlightenment through cognitive assimilation with transcendent realities. Angels and glories may descend to reveal information, but they raise no one into the light. There are no external antidivine powers to be defeated. On the other hand, in the "descent pattern" treatises that portray enlightenment as a gift conferred by a descending revealer, all but two (the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and *Thought of Norea*) associate its advent with a baptismal rite usually called the "Five Seals." Here, a savior descends, not only to elevate the participants out of corporeal and emotional bondage into the world of light, but also to free them from bondage to hostile external powers. In the descent pattern, salvation is effected by the revealer; in the ascent pattern, the revealers merely explain what is heard and seen by the visionary, but it is up to the visionary to actualize the ascent. Platonism from Plato to Plotinus held that the unaided human soul had the power to free itself from bondage to the material world and unite with the divine, and the Platonizing Sethian treatises are no exception. Approximation to the descent pattern only begins with Iamblichus, for whom the soul's ascent requires its illumination and freeing from the body by the lower "visible" gods invoked through theurgical ritual. But unlike the Sethian descent pattern treatises, no invisible transcendent gods descend to earth.

It must also be acknowledged that, although the Platonizing Sethian treatises presume the self-performable character of enlightenment

through visionary ascent, both they and the descent pattern treatises clearly affirm the importance of the divine initiative. The divine realities they describe have themselves ordained, authorized, and revealed the salvific rituals or contemplative practices offered for the readers' emulation. In fact, *Zostrianos* effects a transition between these two approaches by symbolizing the stages of the visionary ascent as ritual actions such as baptism, anointing, and crowning, even though these acts have been entirely transposed into the transcendental realm. In reality, every Sethian text is incomplete, for each points beyond itself to its completion by certain actions or cognitions inexpressible in words. They all require actualization by the readers' own emulation, whether by ritual action, or by contemplative assimilation to transcendent realities.

II. Historical Development in the Sethian Treatises

The detailed analysis of the literary composition and interdependency of all the Sethian treatises in Chapter 6-8 suggests a relative compositional sequence of mutual priority and posteriority. I have suggested that they were produced during a timeline extending from a version of the *Apocryphon of John* known to Irenaeus around 175 CE, to the circulation of versions of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* known to Plotinus and Porphyry around 260 CE. This timeline may be extended both backward and forward: On the one hand, my reconstruction of the compositional history of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and *Apocryphon of John* suggested that they contain material—such as the Pronoia monologue concluding the longer version of the *Apocryphon* and the rather polemical Christological conclusion to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*—that antedates Irenaeus and seems to reflect debates over the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel as early as the first quarter of the second century. Accordingly, one may assign such precursory material to the first half of the second century. On the other hand, certain features of the treatise *Marsanes* link it with the activity of Iamblichus and Theodore of Asine in the late third century. Thus the pre-Plotinian treatises *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*—and probably the *Three Steles of Seth*—would be assigned to the first half—and *Marsanes* and the Untitled text of the Bruce Codex perhaps to the second half—of the third century. Between these extremes, one may place the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the *Thought of Norea*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Melchizedek*, and the *Gospel of the Egyptians*—roughly

in that order—somewhere in the late second or early third century. Of course, since nearly every treatise has its own peculiar history of redactions, one cannot assume a simple unilinear compositional sequence based on the dependence of one upon another, but rather a more complex process of cross-fertilization. Nevertheless, as one traces this compositional sequence, moving from what seem to be relatively early treatises to relatively later ones, there is, in broad terms, a noticeable shift away from the descent pattern of the Pronoia monologue towards the ascent pattern characteristic of the Platonizing treatises. Although there are elements of the ascent pattern throughout the entire corpus, the ascent pattern clearly predominates in the Platonizing group, whose metaphysics resists the notion of salvific descents.

In this transition, the treatise *Zostrianos* occupies a pivotal place. It artfully weaves a distinctive Middle Platonic doctrine of divine emanation together with extensive materials drawn from the Sethian baptismal cult, mainly by way of the *Gospel of the Egyptians*. The resulting revelation discourse must have served the purpose of the mutual clarification and legitimation of one authoritative tradition by another and of exploring the ways in which they mutually illumine one another. The goal was obviously to make Sethian traditions appealing to philosophically-inclined non-Sethians, and to make Platonic doctrine appealing to Sethians. In the latter appeal, *Zostrianos* has effectively transferred Sethian practice and doctrine from an earlier and dominantly biblical—be it Judaic or Christian—into a new—dominantly Platonic—framework.

III. Sethianism as a History of Innovations

I have suggested that this Sethian preoccupation with Platonic metaphysics resulted partly from the gradual exclusion of Sethians from the Christian communities in which they had become participants. My own analysis of the redaction of individual treatises and of the interdependencies among them implies a definite evolution in Sethianism as it moves sociologically from an identity initially distinct from Christianity, to rapprochement with Christianity, to alienation from Christianity, to association with Platonic circles, and to eventual alienation even from these. The significant diversity among the Sethian texts as a whole most likely reveals not so much the writings of a single sect or social group

but rather "indices to a series of related religious innovations." Some of these eventuated in the formation of Sethian communities, but none with the size or perdurance to become "successful" new religious movements. In the words of M. A. Williams, Sethianism can be thought of as a sequence of fascinating, but "failed," religious innovations.[1] Thus, the innovative Sethian Christologies that tried to explain the pre-existent Christ as the self-generated son of Barbelo, or—on a lower level—as identical with the ancient Seth who has recently appeared in the guise of Jesus, seem to have resulted in a gradual expulsion of Sethians from the apostolic churches. Since the basic framework of the Sethian picture of the world and its origin had already incorporated Platonic features, subsequent affiliation with Platonist circles such as that of Plotinus would have seemed a natural move. But again, their innovative multiplication of divine hypostases and apparent disparagement of the physical cosmos and the cause of its origin likely led to increasing opposition from these circles too.

Of course, it is possible that the ascent and descent patterns were merely alternative—rather than successive—conceptions of the path to enlightenment from the beginning of the Sethian movement, but such an assumption cannot account for the elaborate multiplication of psychic realms and post-mortem conditions of souls in *Zostrianos* (e.g., VIII 42,10-44,22 and 27,19-28,30; attested also by Plotinus) compared with the rather simpler four-level hierarchy of psychic realms and conditions within the Four Luminaries of the *Apocryphon of John* (BG 64,14-71,2; II 25,16-27,30).

This consistently innovative character of the Sethian movement in part explains the gradual shift away from the view that salvation depends on divine intervention in the historical process—characteristic of mainstream Judaism and Christianity—towards the view that salvation is best achieved by a self-motivated and self-actualized contemplative ascent to the divine, characteristic of Platonism and a few esoteric forms of Judaism and Christianity. Innovation and esotericism can characterize not only ascetic anchorites, but also dissenters who cluster at the margins of mainstream groups; they can foster both individualism and group formation.

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1. M. A. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 91-93.

IV. Eschatology in the Ascent Pattern Treatises

But how one obtains salvation does indeed make a difference. Salvation as a possibility of self-understanding conferred by divine intervention upon a special group in behalf of its preservation or vindication—and continually re-presented by ritual celebration—leads easily to the formation of communities that announce and extend its availability to others. On the other hand, salvation acquired by contemplative ascent beyond this earth means at least a temporary suspension of community relations, inevitably leading toward increasing self-reliance and individualism. Even more than a loss of community awareness, the Platonizing Sethian treatises seem to reflect a loss of historical consciousness and interest in the myths that narrated the primordial origins of the seed of Seth and thereby generated and encouraged a sense of a shared history.

Accordingly, the eschatology of the Platonizing Sethian treatises is focused, not on the transformation of cosmos or society, but on the spiritual improvement of individuals. Their eschatology is not articulated as a temporal sequence of world ages, but as an ascending sequence of transcendental visions, auditions, and cognitions. The goal or eschaton is the individual's assimilation to the divine rather than the restoration of group fortune or cosmic condition. Such assimilation is experienced periodically and briefly in this life as an anticipation and guarantee of the final ascent of the soul upon death. Whether in this life or at its end, ascent frees the soul from the constraints of the body, which thereby experiences a "double death." It is the undoing of all plurality, not only of the individual psychophysical complex, but also of social plurality. But the sensible cosmos, including its creator and ruler, is to be preserved as it is. While the realization of this eschaton can be expressed temporally as the ultimate return of the soul to its origin upon death, its major expression is not diachronic, but synchronic and vertical, even centripetal: the origin to which one returns is not so much the temporal "once upon a time" of the mythic past, as it is the absolute simplicity and unity that stands both above and at the center of everything.

V. History and Eschatology in the Descent Pattern Treatises

By contrast, the eschatology of the other, probably earlier, Sethian treatises focuses on a sequence of divine interventions in the historical proc-

ess. Its eschaton is the preservation and ultimate triumph of a select group of humans. Some treatises narrate the progressive primordial enlightenment of the readers' antediluvian ancestors—such as Adam, Eve, Norea, and Seth and his seed—as the inauguration and guarantee of their own ultimate salvation. This history of salvation is partitioned into successive epochs or ages reflecting decisive events narrated in the book of Genesis, such as Adam and Eve's origin in—and expulsion from—paradise; the coming of the flood; the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; and the recent advent of a triumphal savior. This scheme is also articulated by the periodic revelatory descents of divine envoys. Texts like the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Pronoia monologue concluding the longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* enumerate them as three successive descents of Barbelo. The *Apocalypse of Adam* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* historicize these descents by locating them at the times of the flood, the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the eschatological nullification of the anti-divine forces. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, these three descents are undertaken by the heavenly Seth. In the *Apocalypse of Adam* an unidentified Illuminator is also said to descend at the same three critical junctures of world history. Similar patterns of descent also implicitly underlie the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, and perhaps also *Melchizedek*.

In some cases, the course of this salvific history is driven by divine interventions into the earthly realm initiated by the female consort of the supreme deity: In the case of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* she is Incorruptibility or the Holy Spirit. In the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, she is Barbelo-Pronoia, the maternal figure of the Father-Mother-Child supreme trinity. But in some treatises, the initiatory role of a heavenly Mother is absent: thus the threefold appearance of the masculine Illuminator in the *Apocalypse of Adam* seems to be unmotivated by any higher figure. In the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the threefold advent of Seth seems to be initiated by the Autogenes and the Four Luminaries at the Invisible Spirit's "good pleasure." The salvation of Norea in the treatise by her name is apparently ascribed to the Four Luminaries sent at the direct behest of the Father of the All. In *Melchizedek*, it is again the Father of the All who sends Gamaliel to baptize and authorize Melchizedek to work for the salvation of all humanity in his capacity as the image of Jesus Christ, the true "high priest of God most high."

VI. The Mother as Descending Savior

In almost all the descent pattern treatises, the eschatological history of salvation is necessitated and set in motion by a lower female figure, Sophia. Barbelo and Sophia share a model-copy relationship in the sense that both are maternal figures. In the *Apocryphon of John*, as the paradigmatic Mother and the supreme deity's vision of himself, Barbelo's maternal role is executed perfectly, since her self-generated Son emerges as her own vision of the supreme deity. By contrast, Sophia's execution of the maternal role is deficient, for she willfully conceives her offspring apart from any vision or permission of the supreme deity, indeed without the cooperation of any male principle. Her unauthorized conception is the actual inauguration of cosmic history, since it is her offspring who creates the world and incarnates divine substance into human bodies, thereby initiating the need for the multiphase process of its restoration to the divine world.

Thus on a lower level, Sophia becomes the cause of cosmogonic deficiency, while on the transcendent level, the higher Mother, (Pronoia, Protennoia, Barbelo) must now undertake the restoration of this deficiency. She accomplishes this by causing direct representations of herself to appear on the earthly, human plane. These manifestations are portrayed as three temporally successive descents, sometimes in her own person (as in the Pronoia monologue), sometimes as modal manifestations of herself (as in the Trimorphic Protennoia's modalities of Voice, Speech, and Logos), or sometimes in the form of her lower doubles or avatars, such as Epinoia/Eve/Zôê. In fact, even the figure of the fallen but restored lower Sophia can participate in the restorative process, sometimes as a copy or envoy of the higher Mother figure—as in the *Apocryphon of John*—and sometimes in the person of her own Repentance—as in the *Gospel of the Egyptians*.

As Barbelo's character is dominantly feminine, most of these avatars are female, but since her true nature is androgynous, her third and final manifestation sometimes occurs as a masculine figure, such as Christ or Seth. Thus the *Trimorphic Protennoia* portrays her final manifestation in the form of the masculine Logos. While the shorter version of the *Apocryphon of John* implicitly identifies the Christ of the frame story as her final manifestation, the longer version makes this identification explicit by portraying Christ as the speaker of the Pronoia monologue. This

masculinization was no doubt influenced by the Christian identification of her self-generated Son as the Christ. But it also had Platonic warrant: since masculinity was identified with determinate form and limitation, her final appearance in masculine form terminates any further descent and diffusion on her part.

VII. The Masculinization of the Mother

All of this changes in the Platonizing Sethian treatises that form the focus of Chapters 12-16. Even though they claim to be ancient revelations left for the benefit of future members of the elect "seed of Seth," they have shifted their focus away from a sacred history punctuated by the salvific descents of the divine Mother and her representatives or equivalents like Christ and Seth. Their Mother and Son are now no longer portrayed as having come to them in saving visitations bearing the enlightening celestial baptism of the Five Seals, since, as we read in the concluding paragraphs of the *Apocalypse of Adam* and *Zostrianos*, the traditional baptismal waters have become polluted. Barbelo no longer descends, but remains in the aeonic realm; thus earthly baptism has to be replaced by a celestial baptism of immersion into, that is, assimilation to the beings of that higher realm. As a result, it is no longer Barbelo's maternal characteristics that are stressed; it is rather her status as the Intellect of the Invisible Spirit that is emphasized, an entity which Platonists traditionally treated in masculine terms (νοῦς). For Platonists, the gods do not descend to earth, and in these treatises Barbelo does not so descend. Indeed, she has become almost completely masculinized. Just as some of the descent pattern treatises limit her further salvific descents by terminating them in her final appearance in male form, so too the Platonizing Sethian treatises limit her further emanation from the Invisible Spirit by her visionary self-determination as a masculine Intellect through contemplation of her source. In the words of *Marsanes* (X 9,1-3): "the Virgin became male because she separated from the male." She is no longer so much the merciful Mother Barbelo as she is the masculine Aeon of Barbelo.

In the visionary ascent scheme, the vertical hierarchy of levels of intelligible being is all-important, since the Gnostic's assimilation with these levels is a contemplative act of the mind. As a divine Intellect, the Aeon of Barbelo is now tripartitioned into contemplated, contemplating,

and demiurgic minds or phases of mind along the lines of the Middle Platonic doctrine characteristic of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Numenius and Amelius, with the result that Barbelo's erstwhile Autogenes Son becomes only the lowest level of her aeon. The progression from Autogenes to Protophanes to Kalyptos is the progression from sequential discursive thought (the individuals) to the perception of the unity of thought and its objects (those who exist together) to the total absorption into pure being (the authentic existents). Not only this, but the Aeon of Barbelo now becomes merely another stage on the ascent to the supreme One from whom she emanated, the Invisible Spirit. According to *Allogenes* and *Marsanes*, one must achieve this by ascending through an additional triad of levels represented by the phases of Barbelo's original emanation, namely each of the three successively predominant powers of the Triple Powered One. In this stage of the ascent, increasingly reflective self-concentration must now transcend the realm of determinate being altogether through the contemplation of each higher power of the Triple Powered One, culminating in assimilation with the purely infinitival and indeterminate being of the Invisible Spirit's pure Existence. At this point intellection gives way to learned ignorance, a non-knowing flash of insight or revelation.

Thus, in the ascent pattern treatises, the older Father, Mother, Son nomenclature for the divine triad in the descent pattern treatises has become obsolete. Barbelo no longer directly confers saving enlightenment, but points beyond herself as a stage on the ascent to her priors. The Aeon of Barbelo encourages and even affords the possibility of contemplative ascent, but does not herself elevate the visionary into the light. Although angels or glories may appear on earth to invite and assist the aspiring visionary, these figures do not "save" anyone by raising them out of the world and they certainly do not descend in acts of judgment against the hostile powers. Once the ascent is underway, certain holy powers may guide the way, but it is the visionary alone who must contemplate and understand for him/herself. The impression one gets is that, in the final analysis, while the *possibility* of visionary enlightenment always needs to be revealed, only the practicing visionary can do the actual hearing and seeing that can alone assimilate one to the nature of the transcendent beings. Indeed, the ultimate destiny of the soul at the death of the body depends upon the knowledge of one's divine affinity thereby acquired.

VIII. The Platonizing Ascent Pattern Treatises

To summarize: This shift in the portrayal of Barbelo from the merciful Mother who descends to rescue "her own" to the (masculine) Aeon that serves as a launching pad toward the vision of still higher principles is evidently the product of Platonic influence. It is certainly possible that the heavenly ascents in certain Jewish and Christian apocalypses offered models for the visionary ascent, particularly the notion of angelic guides who explain the nature and content of successive heavenly levels. But it is really the Platonic tradition of contemplative ascent extending from Plato's *Symposium* through Plotinus that provides the object of the ascent: the contemplation of entities on ever higher ontological levels is characterized as a form of self-knowledge in which the consciousness of the knowing subject is actually assimilated to the ontological character of the level that one intelligizes at any given point. The soul thereby assimilates itself to the ontic nature it once occupied before its descent. Once the soul comes to know its divine affinity, it "saves itself";[2] there is no longer any need to rely on the salvific initiatives of the Mother Barbelo or any other such figure. The revelation and hearing of the divine call to awakening gives way to direct vision; while the descent pattern treatises largely promise the imminent advent of salvation, the ascent pattern treatises portray complete enlightenment as an accomplished fact.

This increasing reliance on self-performable techniques of spiritual ascent seems to have led these Sethian authors to de-emphasize the importance of their own sacred history, and to loosen their sense of being a community defined by ancient tradition. Of course, the Platonizing Sethian treatises continue to presuppose a community of addressees who were devotees of certain teachers and—at least in the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Zostrianos*—had some awareness of membership in a special group, the seed of Seth. But there is no longer any narrative of the history of their preservation and progressive enlightenment throughout the ages.

Compared with the descent pattern treatises, the pregnancy of the present moment is no longer represented by the decisive advent of a divine envoy. Direct encounter with a savior is unnecessary. The possibility of

2. "Understand, then, O you who live, that *you* have succeeded, and have taught *yourselves* about the infinites" (*Three Steles of Seth* VII 127,21-24).

salvation has been "built into the world": divine providence has equipped the world with permanently available "patterns of salvation," perhaps in the form of the ascent pattern treatises themselves. The realization of salvation is not specifically linked with any historical event, or even with any primordial or final event short of one's own death. The ascent is a repeatable act on the part of the reader or hearer of these treatises, who is expected to emulate it, perhaps many times. The enlightenment gained thereby will enable the reader to make the proper choice at the time of death, when the soul must either permanently regain its wings or descend for another round of bodily incarnation. The eschatological moment of salvation does not involve the end of the cosmos, but only the end of one's earthly sojourn, when the ascent will be final and permanent.

In short, the Platonizing Sethian treatises have de-temporalized eschatological time by collapsing it into an eternal present, and de-historicized the Sethian sacred history by mapping it onto a vertical axis of successively higher ontological and cognitive levels. There are no longer any unique salvific events in historical time that require narration or that need to be symbolically recapitulated in ritual acts. Salvation has become a self-actualized, ever-present possibility. Thus as one passes from the earlier Sethian treatises of the descent pattern to those of the ascent pattern, there are several characteristic shifts: from a focus on community membership to a focus on individual enlightenment; from a focus on Jewish and Christian mythology to a focus on Platonic doctrine; from a focus on ritual participation to a focus on contemplative practice; and from a focus on an eschatological history of salvation to a focus on a method of self-actualized spiritual progress.

It may be that the Sethians' gradual shift away from their original communal baptismal context, interpreted by means of a rich history of their primordial origins and salvation, towards the more ethereal and individualistic practice of visionary ascent, contributed to the eventual decay and diffusion of those who identified with the Sethian traditions. Around 375 CE Epiphanius has difficulty recalling where he encountered them, and says that they are not to be found everywhere, but now only in Egypt and Palestine, although, fifty years earlier, they had spread as far as Greater Armenia (*Panarion* 39,1.1-2; 40.1). Apparently no longer identifying themselves as the elect seed of Seth, they nevertheless seem to have survived in various derivative and other sectarian groups such as

the Archontics, Audians, Borborites, Phibionites, Stratiotici and others, some of which survived into the Middle Ages. With the abandonment of their distinctive rites and sacred history, they may also have abandoned their place in history.

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